In Their Own Words:

The 498th in Iraq, 2003

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In Their Own Words:

The 498th in Iraq, 2003

Edited by
Colonel Richard V. N. Ginn, U.S. Army Retired
Annita Ferencz
Dr. Sanders Marble
Gray & Associates, LC

Office of Medical History
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At the time of these interviews, the 498th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) was assigned to the 67th Evacuation Battalion, 44th Medical Command, and was located at Fort Benning, Columbus, Georgia.

In the summer of 2006 the 498th relocated to Hunter Army Airfield, Savannah, Georgia, where on 16 July it was inactivated and re-designated as C Company, 2d Battalion, 3d Aviation Regiment, 3d Combat Aviation Brigade, 3d Infantry Division (Mechanized).

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Introduction

The 498th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) served with the Marines in combat during Operation Iraqi Freedom. This was the first time an Army Dustoff unit was placed with the Marines in direct support of combat operations. It deployed from Fort Benning, Georgia to Kuwait in January 2003 where it was attached to the Marines, who "scratched and clawed" their way to Baghdad, meeting heavy resistance in town after town. The 498th was recognized for its service by award of the Navy Unit Commendation Medal, and it returned to Fort Benning on 10 June 2003. In 2006 it re-located to Hunter Army Airfield, Savannah, Georgia, and was re-designated C Company, 2/3 Aviation, 3d Combat Aviation Brigade, 3d Infantry Division.

In Iraq, the 498th, nominally assigned to the 3d Medical Command, was attached to the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF), the three-star command home-based at Camp Pendleton, California that commanded all Marine units in the theater. It was further attached to Marine Air Group 39, a subordinate unit of the 3d Marine Air Wing.

The company was authorized 150 personnel (10 officer, 26 warrant officer, 114 enlisted) organized into a company headquarters section, operations platoon, aviation unit maintenance platoon and an air ambulance evacuation platoon. The air ambulance platoon had two sections: an Area Support Medical Evacuation (MEDEVAC) Section (ASMS) and a Forward Support MEDEVAC Section consisting of three Forward Support MEDEVAC Teams (FSMT). Each FSMT consisted of three UH-60A Black Hawks, and each helicopter had a crew of four: a pilot in command, co-pilot, crew chief, and flight medic. CPT Adrian Salvetti was the team leader for FSMT 1, CW3 David Barnett headed FSMT 2, and CPT Jonathan Hartman was team leader for FSMT 3.

The 498th aviators were either warrant officers or Medical Service Corps officers. Warrant officer aviators serve in varied aviation assignments, including aeromedical evacuation, while MSC pilots in aviation assignments serve only in medical evacuation positions. The crew chiefs and flight medics were enlisted personnel in the military occupational specialties (MOS) of Helicopter Repair Technician and Health Care Specialist, respectively.

The 498th operated fourteen Black Hawks in Iraq (initially fifteen, but one required rebuild). The ASMS with its five aircraft flew back hauls of patients from Level II facilities in Iraq to Level III military medical facilities in Kuwait, and provided general support of the Marine headquarters and units in Kuwait. CPT Salvetti headed a consolidated team of six aircraft of FSMTs 1 and 2 which flew in support of the 1st Marine Division, co-locating with the Division Headquarters. CPT Hartman's FSMT 3 with its three Black Hawks supported Task Force Tarawa (the 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade). This team also provided support for the British 1st Armoured Division during the initial week of the operation.

The company evacuated 740 patients in 314 missions during 1,687 flight hours, beginning 20 March 2003 when ground operations commenced, and ending 2 May 2003 when the 212th Medical Company (Air Ambulance), Maine National Guard, assumed the medical evacuation mission at Ali Al Salem Air Base, Kuwait.

Comments

The following observations are based on the interviews in this book.

- The personnel interviewed displayed competence and professionalism. In summary, they were proud of the accomplishment of their medical evacuation mission in relieving pain and suffering, and thankful that they did not lose any personnel or aircraft.
- The company commander reported full cooperation and support by the Marines.
- The common impression of the 498th soldiers was that Marines are "different." In general, they liked the Marines. They commented on the more stringent discipline, rank consciousness, readiness to obey orders, and readiness for combat.
- Pilots, especially those with general aviation experience, expressed particular satisfaction with the independence afforded them in flying Dustoff, which is characterized by single ship missions, usually without gun ship support. They did not report any particular restrictions on their employment, such as prohibition of nighttime pickups, requirements for mandatory gunship support, etc.
- Electric towers and power lines were a constant danger. None were lighted. Power lines were coated by the constant sand storms, and had become sand-colored and impossible to see.
- Marines are doctrinally employed in amphibious or ship-deployed operations, and are not set up for a long insertion such as the 250-mile march to Baghdad. For example, they are not equipped with off-the-road fuel tankers. The Army is, with its Heavy Expanded Mobility Tactical Truck (HMETT) tankers, and the 498th's Petroleum, Oil and Lubricants (POL) section ended up refueling the Marine aircraft – including Cobras and Harriers – to the tune of 500,000 gallons at refueling points along the route of advance to Baghdad.
- The FSMT crews constantly relocated in a series of "jumps" as they moved forward with the combat forces. The consolidated team of FSMTs 1 and 2 jumped seventeen times, often at night, in its movement to Baghdad. FSMT 3 jumped eight times during the advance to Al Kut.
- The Marines were not familiar with the Army's Dustoff concept of un-armed aircraft strictly dedicated to medical evacuation. They typically use armed, general aviation helicopters (principally the CH-46) for the purpose of casualty evacuation (CASEVAC). Marine CASEVAC missions should include a Navy corpsman on board, but are interspersed with other general support missions (re-supply, transport, etc.). The 498th had an educational task of communicating the significant difference of Army MEDEVAC to all levels of command.
- A Patient Evacuation Team (PET) at the 1st Marine Division handled medical regulating, and assigned aeromedical missions to the 498th crews.
- One continuing issue, related to the Marines' unfamiliarity with a dedicated air ambulance capability, was requests to move Marines killed in action (KIA) to a graves registration/mortuary services location, which is not a routine MEDEVAC mission. The 498th crews would do this on occasion, but not if it meant compromising their mission readiness by removing an aircraft that was on-station and standing by for MEDEVAC missions.

- One such KIA incident involved Oliver North, LTC, USMC, Ret., who in his capacity as an embedded reporter for Fox News, got about the theater in a Marine helicopter. North demanded that one of the Dustoff crews take a KIA that was on his helicopter, reportedly for two days. He threatened to take the body off the helicopter and leave it on the ground if the Dustoff crew would not take it. The 498th pilot-in-command refused to accept the body, since they were on mission and could not leave their assigned location to transport the KIA to the rear.
- The patient litter "carousel" was employed, even though the 498th heard that this equipment had been removed from the Dustoff Black Hawks operating in Afghanistan. Prior to commencement of combat operations, they conducted some loading drills with the carousel removed, but learned that was not an effective change, and they kept the carousels in their aircraft.
- One flight medic commented that the carousel design makes it difficult to have full access to the patients, and said he preferred the straps and stanchions used in the UH-1 "Huey" helicopters.
- The unit's aircraft were severely deteriorated by the flying conditions in Iraq. The Company picked up their helicopters in Savannah, Georgia on 7 July 2003, and at the time of these interviews, the aircraft were undergoing major overhauls (RESET). There were predictions that some would not be operational until October. A major problem was parts supply, because the initial phase of the Iraq War had severely depleted parts inventories.
- Windscreens (the helicopter windshields) were frequently replaced due to sand and rocks kicked up by landings and takeoffs. Replacement glass became an issue.
- The Black Hawk is a good aircraft, with performance characteristics and avionics that are superior to the Huey. However, it is a much more complex and high-maintenance machine than its predecessor. Electrical problems are the biggest single headache.
- The flight medics reported satisfaction with the preparation provided by their 91W training (the new Health Care Specialist MOS).

Richard V.N. Ginn, COL, USA, Ret.
Springfield, Virginia
March 2007

498th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) Unit History and Lineage
"Dedicated Unhesitating Service To Our Fighting Forces"

The 498th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) was a forward-based medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) unit that traced its lineage to Company C, 57th Medical Battalion, formed on 13 January 1941. The company was reorganized in 1943, re-designated as the 498th Medical Collecting Company, and served in the European Theater of Operations during World War II. After the war, the 498th went through various organizational changes and inactivations. It was activated at Fort Sam Houston, Texas on 23 September 1964 as an air ambulance company, and deployed to Vietnam. It returned to the States in October 1971, and ultimately re-located to Fort Benning, Columbus, Georgia, with assignment to the 56th Evacuation Battalion of the 44th Medical Brigade at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Its mission was to provide emergency aeromedical evacuation support, movement of essential medical personnel, blood or biologicals, and movement of Class VIII re-supply.

At the time of its deployment to Iraq the company was aligned under the XVIII Airborne Corps, but could deploy to any theater of operations to provide direct and general aeromedical evacuation support to any corps or divisional units. Missions while in garrison at Fort Benning included support of the Mountain and Florida Ranger Camps, and Military Assistance to Safety and Traffic (MAST).

The 498th campaign participation history included World War II (as a medical collecting company), Vietnam, Southwest Asia, and Eastern Europe. The Company deployed to Kuwait in January 2003, and was attached to the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force during the initial phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom, culminating in the fall of Baghdad. This was the first time an Army Dustoff unit had been attached to the Marines in combat, and the 498th returned to Fort Benning in June 2003. The Company redeployed to Iraq in 2004, and returned home in 2005. Its decorations include the Joint Meritorious Unit Award, Meritorious Unit Commendation (1 OLC), Navy Unit Commendation, and the Army Superior Unit Award.

In 2006, as part of a reorganization of Army aviation, the 498th relocated to Hunter Army Airfield, Savannah, Georgia. It was inactivated on 16 July and redesignated as C Company, 2d Battalion, 3d Aviation Regiment, 3d Combat Aviation Brigade, 3d Infantry Division (Mechanized).

Major Greg S. Gentry was the Company Commander during the unit's first deployment to Iraq in 2003. CPT William D. Clyde was the Operations Officer, and the First Sergeant was 1SG Alonzo Dixon.

Dustoff

"When I have your wounded."

Major Charles Kelly, MEDEVAC Pilot
57th Medical Detachment (Helicopter Ambulance)
Vinh Long, Vietnam
1 July 1964

Army helicopter pilots have been evacuating wounded soldiers since 1944, saving lives by reducing the time before treatment at hospitals. There were only a few helicopters in World War II, and the Korean War did not start with helicopters ready to carry patients. However, the need was plain and urgent, and the Army quickly responded. Helicopters were assigned and then fitted with litters and patient covers. Heating systems were jury-rigged and then improved to keep patients warm in the brutal winter weather. Later, even blood and plasma were given to patients en route, although there was no way for a medic to treat patients. Ultimately, more than 17,000 patients were moved by helicopters during the Korean War, between 10 and 20 percent of the total movements.

Korea demonstrated how useful helicopter medical evacuation was, and the ability to evacuate casualties became a selection criterion for all Army helicopters. Air ambulance units were created, not just to fly wounded men to a hospital, but to treat them on the way; the creation of the flight medic was a key difference between just casualty evacuation and medical evacuation.

Vietnam would prove the concept. In 1962, as soon as the Army sent a hospital, it also sent a MEDEVAC unit. Vietnam was a war without fronts, where casualties could occur anywhere and at any time; hospitals could not move forward to be behind the front line, and ground evacuation could be slow and risky. The situation demanded MEDEVAC helicopters, and the Army rapidly increased their number, improved their equipment and built a system to coordinate general areas, picking up patients from all units – Army, Marine, South Vietnamese, and other allies.

What the Army could not do was what the men themselves stood up to do. MEDEVAC crews flew wherever and whenever they were needed, flying in all weather, into hostile fire, with or without support. The ethos was to do everything possible to rescue the wounded. Two MEDEVAC pilots, CW2 Michael J. Novosel and MAJ Patrick H. Brady, received the Medal of Honor for their heroic work, repeatedly flying into near-lethal situations to save comrades. Many aircraft – and many crewmen – were hit; the Dustoff Association database lists 90 commissioned and warrant officer pilots and 121 enlisted crewmembers who were killed, a total of 211 (including 5 MIA). MEDEVAC helicopter losses were over three times as high as rates for other helicopters; about fifteen percent of pilots were hit by enemy fire. Ultimately, MEDEVAC crews flew around 900,000 patient movements during the Vietnam War.

After Vietnam, the Army continued its MEDEVAC units, upgrading their equipment and training in line with improvements in Army helicopters as a whole. A special MEDEVAC version of the UH-60 Black Hawk was designed and fielded, and flight medic training increased to the standards of an emergency medical technician. Technology and unit organizations have changed, but the basic elements of MEDEVAC flying are still the same: flying in harm's way to rescue wounded comrades.

Sanders Marble, Ph.D., May 2006

Timeline, Kuwait to Baghdad 2003

Overall Scheme of Attack

Left: 3d Infantry Division moves westward then northward through western desert toward Baghdad.

Center: 1st Marine Expeditionary Force moves along Highway 1 through the center of the country.

Right: 1st (UK) Armoured Division moves northward through eastern marshland.

Timeline

3/20 Start of ground war (preceded by air attacks on Baghdad 3/19)
3d Infantry Division shells Iraq troops near Kuwait Border.
President Bush announces he has ordered Coalition Forces to attack.
US and British forces advance into southern Iraq and enter the port city of Umm Qasar, near major Iraq city of Basra.

3/22 US attempts to occupy Basra.

3/23 US & British forces take airport outside Basra with continued fighting at Basra and Nasiriyah.
Iraqi forces ambush Army's 507th Maintenance Company; PFC Jessica Lynch captured.

3/24 Heavy sand storms

3/25 Coalition fighting Iraq militia in Basra.
US advancing on Baghdad, hampered by extreme sand storms

3/26 173d Airborne Brigade, augmented by 10th Special Forces Group, parachutes into northern Iraq and seizes airfield.

3/27 US forces take a bridge on the Euphrates River at Samawah after fierce fighting.

3/29 US forces had reached Karbala. Fighting continues at Najaf, Nasiriyah and Basra.

4/1 Hadithan dam on the Euphrates captured.
Special Operations forces rescue PFC Lynch from a hospital in Nasiriyah.

4/2 US forces seize bridges over Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and are within 35 miles of Baghdad

4/3 US forces attack Saddam International Airport, 10 miles southwest of capital.

4/5 US armored vehicles drive through Baghdad

4/6 Baghdad encircled by US forces

4/7 British forces take Basra

4/9 Baghdad falls. Statute of Saddam pulled down by U.S. forces.

4/10 Kirkuk falls

4/11 Mosul falls

4/13 Marines enter Tikrit, home of Saddam.

4/15 Coalition declares war over.

Advance of FSMTs 1 and 2 with the 1st Marine Division
18 March – 13 April 2003
CPT Adrian Salvetti

Editor's Note:

Ground combat operations commenced in Iraq on Thursday, 20 March 2003. On the left the 3d Infantry Division moved westward then northward through the desert toward Baghdad. The 1st Marine Expeditionary Force moved along highway 1 through the center of the country. On the right, the 1st (UK) Armoured Division moved northward through eastern marshland.

Baghdad fell on 9 April. By 15 April, Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit had fallen and the Coalition partners were reporting the war was effectively over. On 1 May, President Bush, aboard the USS *Abraham Lincoln*, declared the end of major combat operations.

Map No. / Day

1. (Day 1, 18 March 03) Left Ali Al Salem, our Company's staging area. The Company Main would remain at Ali Al Salem for about the first 30 days. Moved one team to the staging area for the Division Main. Responded to some limited missions inside Kuwait.

2. (Day 2) Jumped twice. Moved both teams to the staging area for the Division Forward. This was our first time with the Forward. Realized the Forward was much less accommodating of our footprint than the Main was. Responded to first missions inside Iraq. Spent the night at the 2d jump.

3. (Day 3, 20 March 03) Went back over to the Division Main, still inside Kuwait. At this point the fighting began.

4. (Day 4) The morning after the first day of fighting we moved into Iraq to the Division Forward. Our night crews arrived prior to the day crews, because the jump was made in the middle of the night. The day crews stayed at Kuwait without any Marine support until the next morning, and then made the jump.

5. (Day 4-6) At this location there was a MASCAL called in that turned out to be incorrect.

6. (Day 6-8) Jumped very far forward around An Nasiriyah to the Division Forward. A tremendous sand storm hit that night. This was a miserable spot with lots of flies. The Forward was still wrestling with our presence and making little effort to accommodate us.

7. (Day 8-9) The next day attempted a jump, but low visibility from the sand storm stopped the team's movement at a FARP. Could not fly all day and night. We were essentially out of the loop at the FARP.

8. (Day 9-13) Next day jumped forward to the Division Main. The morning of this movement was the heaviest flying day of the war for our team. We were catching up on many missions delayed because of the storm. Stayed for several days, while fighting stalled during the An Nasiriyah clean up to the south.

9. (Day 13-14) We jumped from the Main to the Forward at night. I tried to avoid this because it made things very complicated, but we were not given permission to move until night. When we arrived, the Forward again failed to account for us. We could not land at their position so we landed at a FARP near by and I negotiated a spot for our team at the end of the FARP runway. Ironically, the next day Marine Corps aircraft were parked all around the Division Forward HQ where we were told we could not park. We received very few missions at this spot.

10. (Day 14-15) We jumped to the Main after a two-day stay (I think) at the FARP. The Main location was in a really pleasant field of tall grass. It was a nice change from some of the dirt patches we had been in before.

11. (Day 15-17) We jumped to a dirty and ugly location at the Forward. Spent the night with a KIA dropped at our feet to take care of. Evacuated him during the next mission outbound. Our evacuation lines had been growing very long to this point. Now an airfield was opened southwest of Al Numaniyah very near the old Division Main location (#10). A treatment facility was set up there and C-130s began to make regular runs. This would later turn into our Company location when they moved up at around the 30-day point. At this time we started getting missions into the Baghdad area.

12. (Day 17-18) We were forced to jump to a FARP at this time. The Division HQ was to send missions through the FARP to us. If I remember correctly we received very few missions during this time. Of course we were situationally completely out of the loop.

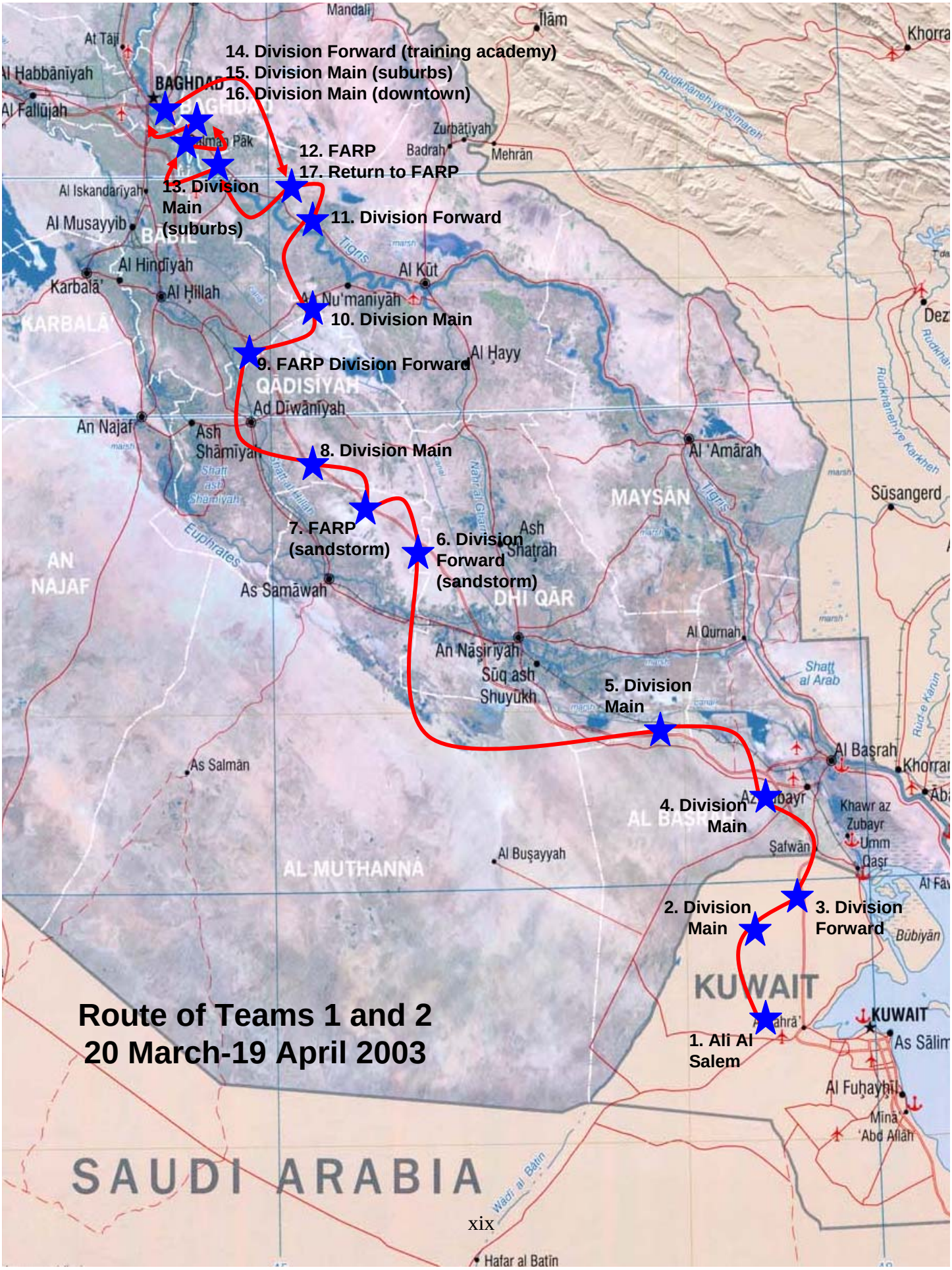
13. (Day 18-19) Made another night jump to the Main's location. Stayed for a day or two and continued with a decent mission load. Many Marine Corps helicopters parked with us at the Main's location. At this point success was assured and spirits lightened, but the mission was still driving on.

14. (Day 19-21) Jumped to the Forward's location at a military training complex on the east side of Baghdad. Received many missions in the Baghdad area. Moved many patients down to the airfield near Al Numaniyah.

15. (Day 21) Jumped to a very temporary location with the Main. Were only there for a couple of hours when it was determined that its location in the suburbs was no good. It was ordered to move into downtown Baghdad. We temporarily moved to the old Forward location at the training academy and then on to the new Main location downtown.

16. (Day 21-24) Squeezed our entire team inside the walls of a government complex in the downtown area. The Main took up residence inside the buildings and planned on staying in that location for some time. Missions continued with frequency.

17. (Day 24-26) Our last jump as a team was back to one of the FARPS. We then rotated two crews to the Main location every 8 hours. This was convenient for the Division HQ to get us out of their AO, but they lost the ability to quickly surge crews on flex shifts and our "off duty" crews lost situational awareness again. After several days at the FARP, we moved the team down to the Company location at the airfield near Al Numaniyah and blended back into the Company.


14. Division Forward (training academy)
15. Division Main (suburbs)
16. Division Main (downtown)
12. FARP
17. Return to FARP
13. Division Main (suburbs)
11. Division Forward
10. Division Main
9. FARP Division Forward
8. Division Main
7. FARP (sandstorm)
6. Division Forward (sandstorm)
5. Division Main
4. Division Main
2. Division Main
3. Division Forward
1. Ali Al Salem
Route of Teams 1 and 2
20 March-19 April 2003
BAGHDAD
BABIL
KARBALA'
QADISIYAH
AN NAJAF
MAYSAN
DHI QAR
AL MUTHANNA
AL BASRAH
KUWAIT
SAUDI ARABIA
Mandali
Ilam
Khorramabad
At Tajl
Al Habbaniyah
Al Fallujah
Salman Pak
Zurbatiyah
Badrah
Mehran
Al Iskandariyah
Al Musayyib
Al Hindiyah
Karbala'
Al Hillah
Al Kut
An Nu'maniyah
Al Hayy
Ad Diwaniyah
An Najaf
Ash Shamiyah
Al 'Amarah
Susangerd
Euphrates
As Samawah
Ash Shatrah
An Nasiriyah
Suq ash Shuyukh
Al Qurnah
Shatt al Arab
As Salman
Al Basrah
Az Zubayr
Khawr az Zubayr
Umm Qasr
Safwan
Al Busayyah
Al Fahahil
As Salim
Al Fuhayhil
Mina 'Abd Allah
Hafar al Batin
Wadi al Batin

Advance of FSMT 3 with the 1st UK Armoured Division and Task Force Tarawa of the First Marine Expeditionary Force
18 March - 13 April 2003
CPT Jonathan Hartman

Editor's Note:

As described elsewhere, ground combat operations in Iraq commenced on Thursday, 20 March 2003. On the left, the 3d Infantry Division moved westward, then northward through the desert toward Baghdad. The 1st Marine Expeditionary Force moved along highway 1 through the center of the country. On the right, the 1st (UK) Armoured Division moved northward through eastern marshland. CPT Hartman's FSMT 3 was initially in support of the 1st (UK) Armoured Division as it proceeded on the right.

CPT Hartman re-created the following timeline from his notes three years later, and the dates are his best estimates. The paragraph numbers refer to the numbered locations on the map of Team 3's route of advance.

This was my team's approximate route as best as I can recall. We were initially attached to the 1st UK Armoured Division supporting the Al Faw peninsula at Umm Qasr and Basrah. We then were chopped to 2 MEB/Task Force Tarawa and headed northwest through An Nasariyah (where we got stalled) until ending up at Al Kut, and finally being pulled back to my CO HQ at the end of April.

1. O/A 17 March 2003 left Ali Al Salem staging area and the 498th Company Headquarters;
   3/18 – Stage with Brits south of Iraq border – plan/prep for invasion; very nervous time – the unknown. A frog missile (I was told that's what it was…?) flew overhead during preflight. Was told it landed at the front gate of a base camp in Kuwait. Very fun experience living and working with 1st UK Armoured Division.

2. Moved to the Division Main, 1st Marine Division.

3. Moved to the Division Forward. Combat operations began O/A 20 March. We were attached to the 1st UK Armoured Division for about a week and supported their operations in the Al Faw Peninsula at Umm Qasr and Al Basrah.
   3/20 – We began flying missions – quite slow at first; did mostly night ops around the ports of Umm Qasr. The flying was quite chaotic – mostly NG at that time, many fires burning around the oil fields. Commo was difficult; a lot of bad grids/LZs.
   3/21 – Picked up LCpl Guiterrez. Was told this was the first Marine KIA, but have seen conflicting reports that he was the second. Either way, it was our first American KIA and it made everything very real.

4. We then were chopped to 2 MEB/Task Force Tarawa where we began moving northwest through An Nasariyah.
   3/24 – Get chopped over to the Marines – TF Tarawa/2nd MEB. Little FOB in the middle of the desert – just in time for the huge shamal. Cobras and UH-1s flying through the sand using

their FLIR.* No fun explaining why you can't fly to the Marine Air Boss as a Cobra flies directly over the air cell.

*Unlike Marine aircraft, the Army Dustoff helicopters were not equipped with Forward Looking Infrared (FLIR), an electro-optical thermal imaging device that greatly assists in flying at night, in fog, or when it is completely dark (such as a cloudy, moonless night).

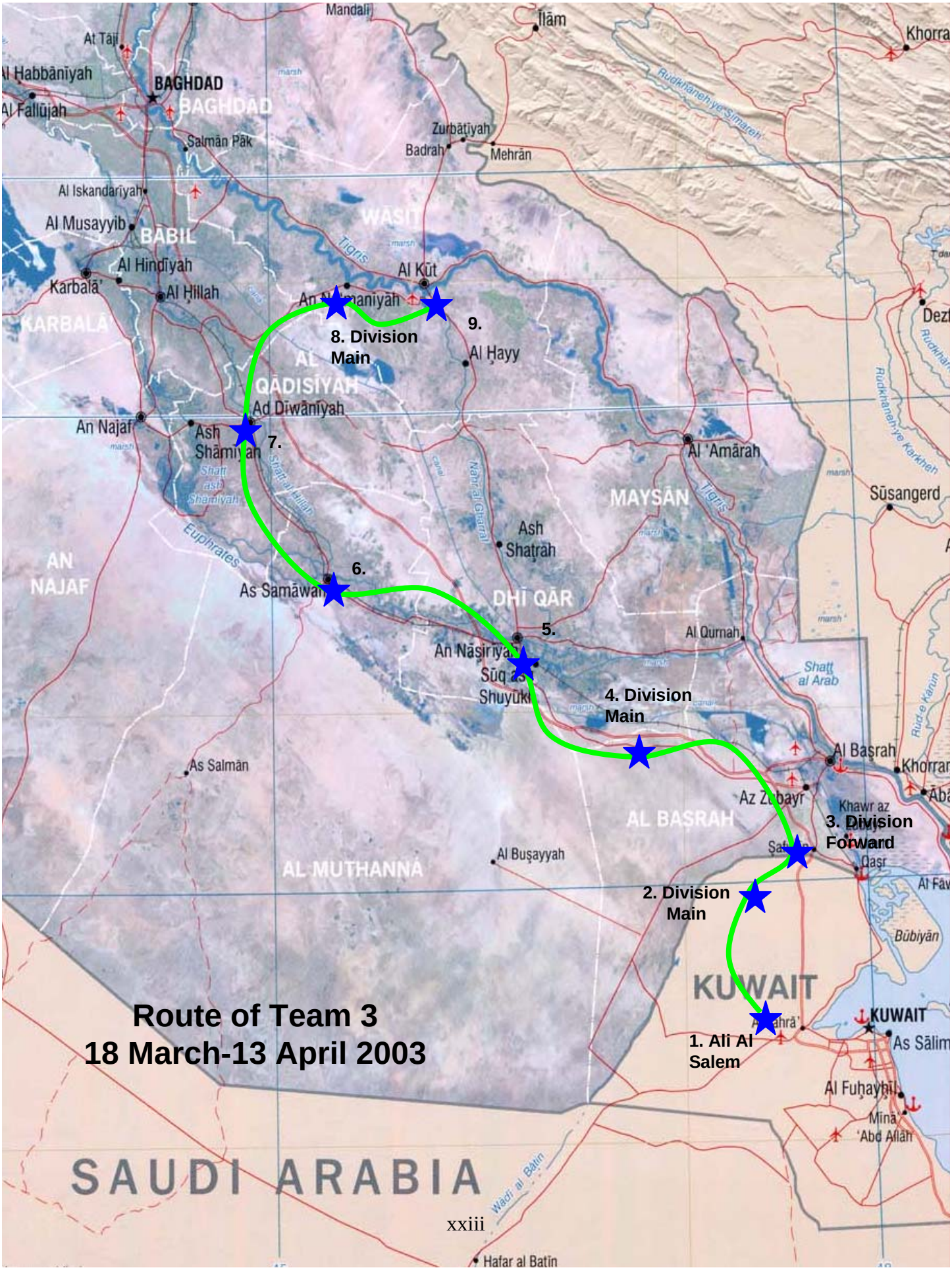
5. We were stalled in An Nasariyah.
   3/26 – Jump to just south of An Nasiriyah. Pick up a lot of work. Apparently An Nasiriyah was not the cakewalk that G2 had anticipated. Supply issues – rationing MREs/H20. We arrive during the Jessica Lynch incident. Supply lines/evac lines are beginning to increase exponentially.

6. Moved to As Samawah
   4/3 – My notes kind of drop off here – too busy. Can't find any timeline for As Samawah and Ad Diwaniyah – Possibly 4/3...? No recollection of details for either place.

7. Moved to Ash Shamiyan

8. Moved to the Division Main
   4/9? – Jump to Al Nu'maniyah. No details other than the feeling that things are winding down. Whole team is glued to BBC radio when not flying – kind of interesting to hear the spin on the news while you're seeing the real deal (at least your view of the real deal).

9. We ended up at Al Kut and finally being pulled back to my CO HQ at the end of April.
   4/12? – Final move to Al Kut. Again, things are winding down – we are still flying a lot of missions but not as intense as prior weeks. 498th HQ moves into Iraq about this time and pulls the other teams back with them – I think to Al Nu'maniyah…? My CO keeps my team at Al Kut until 25 April. We live with Force Recon Marines – very loud bunch!


Route of Team 3
18 March-13 April 2003
1. Ali Al Salem
2. Division Main
3. Division Forward
4. Division Main
5.
6.
7.
8. Division Main
9.
KUWAIT
SAUDI ARABIA
BAGHDAD
AL BASRAH
AL MUTHANNA
DHĪ QĀR
MAYSĀN
AN NAJAF
KARBALĀ'
BĀBIL
WASIT
AL QĀDISIYAH
Tigris
Euphrates

DUSTOFF
CPT Eastman
CW4 Debbs
CW3 Williams
CW3 Treadv
CPT Hall
SSG Williams B
SGT McQuown
SGT Talley J
SGT Richardson M
SPC Defeo
SPC James

Photo Identification, clockwise from upper left:

1. CW2 Jason K. Wright
2. SSG Bryant A. Williams
3. SPC Robert J. Dahlen
4. MAJ Greg S. Gentry
5. SSG Gregory Givings
6. CPT Jeremy M. McKenzie
7. CW2 Albert G. Hill
8. CPT Thomas D. Mallory
9. CPT Adrian M. Salvetti
10. SPC Michael S. Tilley
11. SSG Michael O. Richardson
12. CW2 Paul K. Bryant

Photo courtesy of CPT Jeremie McKenzie

"It was interesting. I was sitting at home having Christmas Eve dinner and we got the phone call. I told the family. 'Well, my leave has been canceled.' I was going to take leave after Christmas. I was going to pull duty on Christmas day and then take leave afterwards. That way my troops would get the week off. So for everybody it was kind of a glum Christmas." --CPT Jeremy M. McKenzie

Photo courtesy of CPT Jeremie McKenzie

"Well, when we first got there we were living at Arifjan, which is in the southern portion of Kuwait near the coast. It is a big logistical support area. By the end of the war, it had grown into a very large area that had all the supporting agencies there. We stayed on cots in a very long, big empty warehouse for about two weeks, waiting to move to where some of the Marines Corps aviation assets were located, Ali Al Salem Air Base, which is a Kuwaiti airbase shared with the U.S. Air Force. We stayed at Arifjan for about two weeks, and while we were there, we tried to get some preparations done. It was difficult because we didn't have any resources whatsoever, except for the little equipment support package that we brought for the advance party. We didn't have computers. We didn't have any kind of communications resources. So we had to borrow from our Army higher headquarters." –CPT Adrian Salvetti

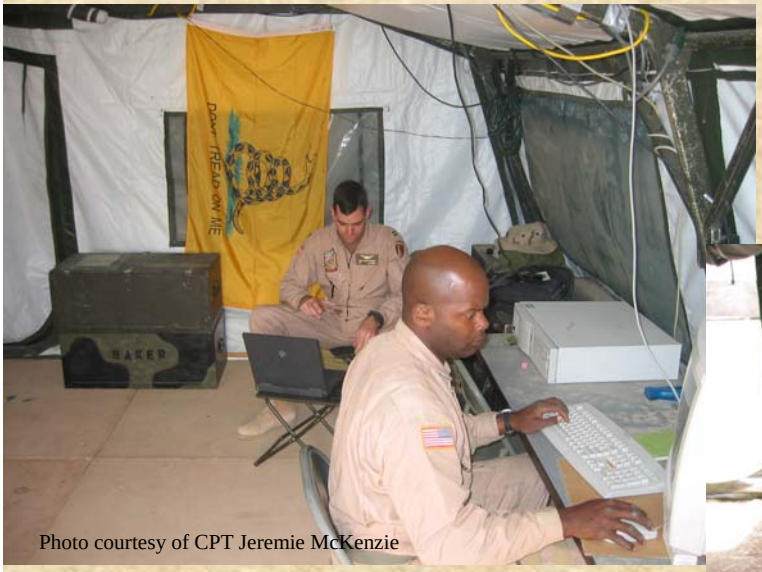


Photo courtesy of CPT Jeremie McKenzie

Photo courtesy of CPT Jeremie McKenzie

Photo courtesy of CPT Adrian Salvetti

"Our headquarters was at Ali Al Saleem Airbase, which is about 30 minutes west of Camp Doha. That's where MAG 39 was. The Marines were spread out all through Kuwait, but they called MAG 39 our Den Daddy. We weren't working for them but they were feeding us, protecting us, housing us; you know, taking care of basic stuff like that. They had a great S2/S3 section and operations center where we could get threat briefs, threat information, and information to launch our missions." – MAJ Greg Gentry

Photo courtesy of CPT Adrian Salvetti

"That's the Snake Pit. But it was a sand box. It was just nothing but sand." – SPC Robert Dahlen

Inset photos courtesy of CW2 Albert G. Hill

Photo courtesy of CPT Jeremy M. McKenzie

"Well, the terrain just south of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers is very flat and sandy, just what everybody pictures as desert. When the winds pick up, the visibility goes down to hardly anything. Once you get north of those two rivers there is more vegetation. They've got rice fields and different types of fields and crops that they are cultivating." --MAJ Greg S. Gentry

Pictures courtesy of SSG Michael O. Richardson

Photo courtesy of CPT Adrian Salvetti

Photo courtesy of CPT Adrian Salvetti

Photo courtesy of CPT Adrian Salvetti

Photo courtesy of CPT Jeremie McKenzie

"Now we are outside with blowing sand, with open fuel cells, open hydraulic lines. It is really hard to keep that stuff clean when you are trying to protect it while you are doing repairs. [Our helicopters were] dark green, so by ten o'clock in the morning you couldn't be on top of an aircraft if it was sitting outside, because it was just too hot. It would almost pull the skin off you. It is probably 30 or 40 degrees hotter on top of the aircraft." –CPT Thomas Dax Mallory

Photo courtesy of CPT Jeremie McKenzie

"We did some practicing. Some flight crews went to maybe eight different Marine sites in Kuwait, trying to teach them that, first of all, 'This is a Black Hawk,' because Marines don't have Black Hawks. We experimented with some different ways of loading. We had heard from Afghanistan that they had been taking out the carousel…but it turned out that technique was not going to work for us."

–CPT Adrian Salvetti

Photo courtesy of CW2 Jason Wright

Photo courtesy of CW2 Jason Wright

"One thing I'll never forget is all the dust storms over there were insane, especially when we got up into Iraq and the war was going on. I think it was about two weeks into the war, and everybody just got stuck. All the helicopters were on the ground; the convoys couldn't roll anymore. Nothing could move in the dust storms. We just sat in our helicopter all day and the wind was blowing. We thought a couple of times we were going to get blown over, the wind was so hard. You couldn't see past the rotor blades because the dust was just so thick and I'll never forget that." --SPC Michael S. Tilly

Photo courtesy of CW2 Jason Wright

"We were still sitting on the ground when they called back on the radio and said, "Have you got room for two more?" We were up to five total now, so I'm thinking, "Yeah, we've got room for two more," because we've got one guy sitting on the floor. My medic said, "Hey, you can put him in my seat. I'll just stand up," because he was going to be working on them anyway. It was kind of cramped in there." --CW2 Jason K. Wright

"Every time was a dice roll, because it's just that dust and dirt, and it is different everywhere you're landing. It may be just granular sand that you can see through, but it is still dusty and a hell of a mess…It is those other ones, just like pumice, that just as soon as you come down, it engulfs you...I mean you are at 100 feet, and you are already kicking up a dust cloud down there that's starting to build. So you've got to come in with forward speed. You've got to try and estimate the situation real fast. 'How fast shall I come in to beat that dust ball that's going to be building at my tail?', so that I time it just right so when it engulfs the cockpit, I'm putting it down." --CW2 Jason K. Wright

Photo courtesy of CW2 Jason Wright

Photo courtesy of CPT Jeremie McKenzie

"We jumped every day, and we'd land there and go to sleep. Sleep right there in the helicopter, back in the little litter pans in the aircraft, kind of like bunk beds back there. Not very comfortable, but we'd sleep back there and get up the next morning." --CW2 Jason K. Wright

"But, my team, they were good. The understood after a couple of jumps that we were going to be jumping all the time. They understood that I was going to ask them every time we jumped, 'See that pile of equipment over there that we're not using, that we brought to Iraq that we thought we were going to use? I'll help you, but you've got to put that in the helicopter every single time we jump, and then cart it over to our new location and dump it out.' " --CPT Adrian Salvetti

Photo courtesy of CPT Jeremie McKenzie

"One great success we had that didn't involve any of our aircrews at all was my POL section, because we had HEMTT tankers…. We loaned five of our HEMMTs to MALS 39 to provide the refueling mission, so when the Marines breached the border at Kuwait, our POL guys were leading the way…. Those guys pumped almost 500,000 gallons of fuel for the Marines, fueling all different kinds of aircraft. I mean, they were refueling Harriers; you name it, they did it. They did that because the Marines didn't have the all-wheel drive capability that our guys do and couldn't go to some of the places that they had to." --MAJ Gentry

Photo courtesy of CW2 Jason Wright

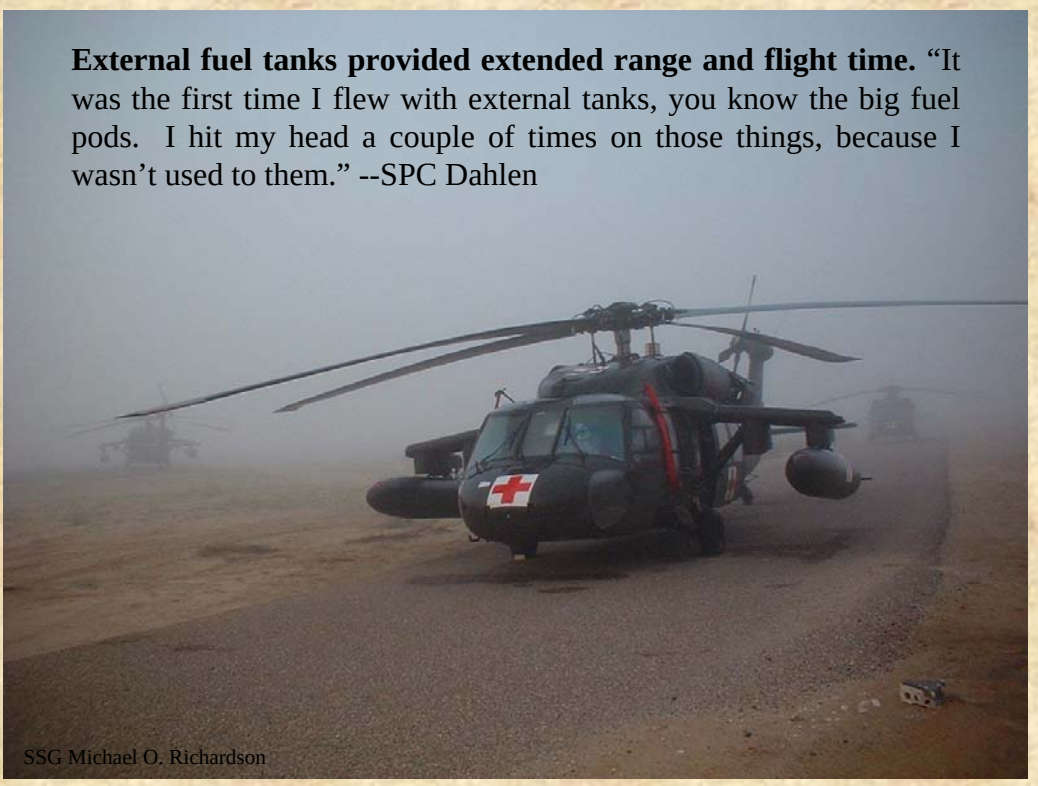
Photo courtesy of CPT Adrian Salvetti

"One night after we completed a mission, we flew to a FARP that they had briefed us was going to be open. We got down there low on fuel, but the FARP was shut down already. …Fortunately the POL guys from my company were at that location and one of them recognized our aircraft. He just happened to have some fuel left in his HEMTT vehicle and they told us to go ahead and land." --CW2 Albert Hill

Photo courtesy of CPT Adrian Salvetti

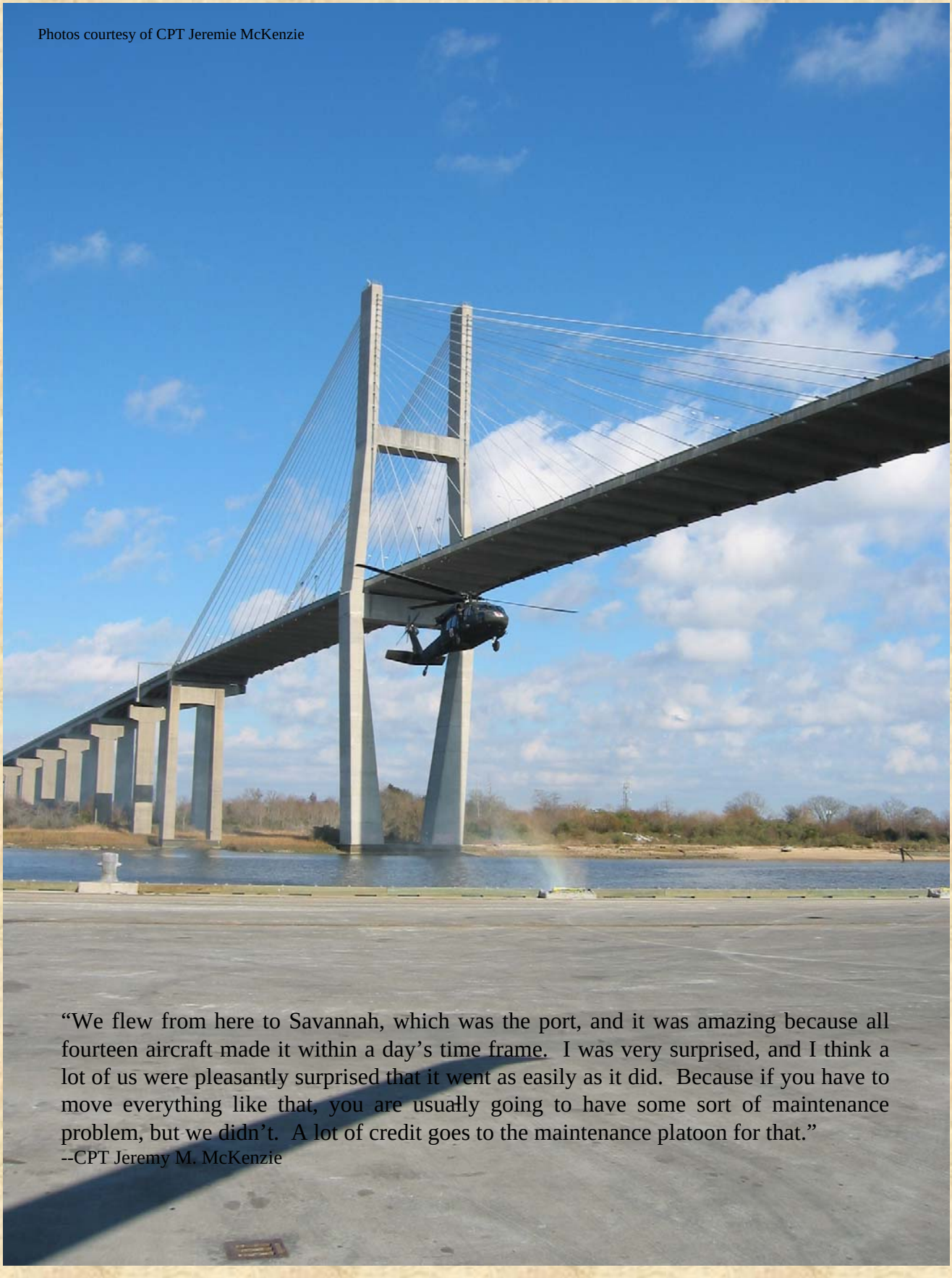
"Communications were sketchy, radio communications especially. We had high frequency radio, and we did some communications exercises with the PET guys, Marines, Navy and other Army units. We got it working fairly well, but I'll tell you that when the bullets started flying, the high frequency radio went out. It was just too difficult to make it work, so we didn't use that a lot." -- MAJ Greg S. Gentry

External fuel tanks provided extended range and flight time. "It was the first time I flew with external tanks, you know the big fuel pods. I hit my head a couple of times on those things, because I wasn't used to them." --SPC Dahlen



SSG Michael O. Richardson

Photos courtesy of CPT Jeremie McKenzie



"We flew from here to Savannah, which was the port, and it was amazing because all fourteen aircraft made it within a day's time frame. I was very surprised, and I think a lot of us were pleasantly surprised that it went as easily as it did. Because if you have to move everything like that, you are usually going to have some sort of maintenance problem, but we didn't. A lot of credit goes to the maintenance platoon for that."
--CPT Jeremy M. McKenzie

Photo courtesy of CPT Jeremy McKenzie

"So we got on the plane and the crew was very nice. 'Yeah, we all volunteered to be here.' The captain announced that they had an open cockpit policy, so several of us rode up front. Some of our soldiers said, 'We want to be flight attendants for the day.' So they gave a couple guys aprons and they helped serve food. We had a lot of fun. We finally got back here, and everybody was really tired. It was a very long day of traveling. We got bused to here, and the welcoming was surprising. They had banners up along the hangar and there were maybe 300 people waiting for us. They were screaming and yelling, and the band was there. It was a neat experience, and it was something I definitely will always remember." --CPT Jeremy M. McKenzie

In Their Own Words:

The 498th in Iraq
2003

AMEDD ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM
INTERVIEW OIF 060

INTERVIEW WITH
MAJ GREG S. GENTRY, COMMANDER
498TH MEDICAL COMPANY (AIR AMBULANCE)

CONDUCTED BY
COL RICHARD VAN NESS GINN, USA, RET.
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA
19 AUGUST 2003

OFFICE OF MEDICAL HISTORY
OFFICE OF THE SURGEON GENERAL, U.S. ARMY/
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. ARMY MEDICAL COMMAND
FALLS CHURCH, VIRGINIA

Q: This interview is with MAJ Greg S. Gentry, MSC, the Company Commander. Greg, please elaborate on the organization of the 498th.

A: We normally have fifteen aircraft, but I have fourteen right now because we sent one in for a refurb in Texas before we deployed. Each helicopter has four crew members.

The Operations Platoon is headed up by CPT Casey [William D.] Clyde. The platoon has a couple of different sections. The Operations Section includes all my RTOs [Radio Telephone Operators] and 93-P flight operations personnel [now MOS 15-P]. The flight operations folks do our battle tracking, close out records, maintain aviation records, and flight following. The POL [Petroleum, Oil and Lubricants] section has six HEMTT [Heavy Expanded Mobility Tactical Truck] tankers. They are able to operate six different teams to refuel aircraft in different locations. And that's kind of how we use them on the battlefield.

The Aviation Unit Maintenance Platoon is headed up by another captain as well [CPT Thomas D. Mallory]. There are two different sections. The Aircraft Maintenance Section does all the routine scheduled maintenance on the aircraft, and some unscheduled jobs as well. Then we have the shops section which consists of tech supply, avionics, sheet metal, and other sections that conduct the majority of the unscheduled maintenance jobs.

The Flight Platoon [Air Ambulance Evacuation Platoon] is also headed up by a captain [In Iraq: CPT Jeremy M. McKenzie].

This platoon provides four flight teams; each team has three aircraft. Three teams are called Forward Support MEDEVAC [medical evacuation] Teams [FSMTs]. Doctrinally, each FMST supports a maneuver brigade with three aircraft that provide forward casualty evacuation. The fourth team is the Area Support Team, which provides area support for the Division rear and general support to the units forward.

Q: What model Black Hawk are you flying?

A: We fly the UH-60 MEDEVAC helicopter.

Q: Describe the medical components.

A: The UH-60 Alpha MEDEVAC helicopter is a little bit different from the regular Black Hawks. We have a MEDEVAC kit that goes in the back with a carousel to load four to six patients, and we have a high performance hoist. That's really the major difference between us and the regular assault Black Hawk.

Q: Did you use the carousel in Iraq?

A: We did. When we first went over there, based on lessons learned during Desert Storm, we thought we would probably take those out due to their weight, which would make it difficult to fly because of the heat. But after training with the Marines, we decided it was just too difficult getting patients in and out without the carousel. So we elected to keep them. I am told all the other MEDEVAC units over there also kept their carousels in as well, due to the number of patients that we were required to fly.

Q: Although it is difficult without a photograph, please describe the carousel.

A: There is a center pole that runs vertically inside the cabin of the aircraft. Around that is built the carousel. You are able to put two litter patients "double bunked" in litter pans mounted on either side of the pole. There is a modification we use that will put another litter pan on each side so you can stack three litter patients on either side. If you have ambulatory patients, you can take out one side of those litter pans, and then seat three patients.

A: So the patients are loaded from side to side across the helicopter?

A: Yes. You load them perpendicularly to the aircraft, and then you rotate the carousel so they are lying in the direction of flight. That way the medic can have the best access to the patients.

Q: Describe your chain of command.

A: We belong to the 56th Medical Evacuation Battalion, which is headquartered at Fort Bragg. The battalion is part of the 44th Medical Brigade, an element of XVIII Airborne Corps.

Q: Are you attached to a unit here at Fort Benning?

A: For administrative purposes they roll us up under the 36th Engineer Group. There is an MOA (Memorandum of Agreement) between Fort Benning and Fort Bragg that attaches us for specific administrative issues.

Q: Who did you belong to in Iraq?

A. Officially we belonged to 3d MEDCOM. That was who we were assigned to over there. 3d MEDCOM then in turn attached us to the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, which in turn put us underneath the 3d MAW [3d Marine Air Wing], which rolled us down to MAG 39 [Marine Air Group 39].

Q: Did you call them jarheads?

A: You never did that to their face. Actually, there are a lot of jokes from working for those

guys, and I'm sure they had plenty about us as well. But I'll tell you, we had a great relationship. They took us in just like we were one of their own.

We were very hesitant to begin with, because I have worked for task forces that treated us like stepchildren. But MEDEVAC had never been used in a direct support role for the Marines before, and they were enthusiastic about us working with them. They were glad to have us. Overall it was a great experience.

Q: We are going to come back to the Marines in a minute. But first, let's talk a little bit about yourself: your background, where you're from, where you went to school, marriage, family, kids.

I was born in Winston-Salem, North Carolina in 1966. I'm married. My wife and I were married in 1990, and I have two kids that we home school – two boys, age eight and six. We are both from North Carolina, and both graduates of Appalachian State University in North Carolina. I graduated in 1988 and came on active duty in 1988 as well**.** My initial assignment was with the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. I did a couple of ground jobs there: I was in a medical company as a ground ambulance platoon leader in Charlie Company, 326th Medical Battalion, and then took an assignment as a medical platoon leader where I deployed to Desert Storm with the 3/502d Infantry Battalion. Upon re-deployment I was assigned back to the 326th Medical Battalion where I served as the XO for Bravo Company, FSMC. I was then accepted to flight school and PCSd to Fort Rucker for initial qualification. From there I was assigned to the 377th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) in Korea where I served as a flight section leader and flight platoon leader.

After Korea, I attended the Advanced Course at Fort Sam Houston, and after that went to Fort Bragg, where I was the Flight Operations Officer in the 57th Air Ambulance Company, and later the Battalion Operations Officer in the 56th Medical Evacuation Battalion. I also worked ten months in the DMOC [Division Medical Operations Center] of the 82d Airborne Division. I then went to Fort Sam Houston where I was a Combat Developer on the UH-60Q Program, which is the new improved MEDEVAC helicopter. I then came here to Fort Benning to command the 498th Medical Company (Air Ambulance).

Q: Were you in ROTC in college?

A: Yes, I was.

Q: And where did you do your summer camp?

A: Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Q: When did you go to jump school?

A: I went to jump school as a cadet in 1987, here at Fort Benning, Georgia.

Q: Where are the UH-60Qs being fielded?

A: Initially there were four that belonged to an Army National Guard unit in Chattanooga, Tennessee, CECAT (Medical), at the AASF #3. This unit served as the test bed for the UH-60Q from 1993-1998. They are now building HH-60s based on improvements to the UH-60Q model. The 507th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) at Fort Hood, Texas has the first few now.

Q: Where will they be fielded as they reach full production?

A: They are fielding them now. I'm not sure who is getting them after the 507th. The Army is trying to decide whether they wanted to do one whole unit at a time, or piecemeal them out three at a time.

Q: What are the most significant advantages that aircraft can give you over the UH-60As you currently have in the 498th?

A: At least from a pilot's perspective, the front end and the cockpit are much better than what we have now. They have an upgraded avionics and communications package in addition to a forward looking infrared radar for CSAR applications. They also have the more powerful 701C [General Electric] engines which will alleviate many of the power management problems the A models have.

In the cabin it's a little different setup. They've gotten rid of the carousel, and now load the patients on the side with electronic litter loaders that you put the patients on. You push a button and the litters raise or lower as needed to load, treat, and unload the patients.

Q: Discuss the deployment to Iraq.

A: LTC MacDonald [LTC David L. MacDonald, MSC] who was the Battalion Commander of the 56th, called me the day before Christmas while everybody was on leave and told me we were going to get the call on the 26th of December, and that's what happened.

I brought all the key leaders off leave right away, and we talked through the plan. We realized we had a little bit of time to react, so we let the majority of the soldiers continue on leave while the key leaders continued to refine the plan.

Q: How much time did you have before you actually had to move out?

A: We had about two weeks from when everyone returned from leave before we needed to

start loading our equipment. We also decided to send one team ahead of the rest of the company. CPT Salvetti headed this up as the team leader with three aircraft. They were to deploy their aircraft and crews by C-5 to get there first, because we were the first MEDEVAC company that was going to be over there in total. So we wanted some initial capability on the ground.

We didn't know what we were walking into or who we were going to be supporting. We wanted to get something on the ground so we'd have some type of operational capability as soon as we got there.

They deployed on 19 January along with my Operations Officer, CPT Casey Clyde. The main body deployed a day later on the 20th.

As often happens, things got mixed up. Planes were delayed and the main body ended up arriving in the morning, prior to the ADVON [Advanced Echelon] getting there. All the people who were put on the ADVON to work those issues and to work bed-down plans and equipment issues basically got there after the main body.

That was a little confusing, but we finally got settled in at Camp Arifjan in Kuwait, which is about an hour south of Camp Doha. We were there close to thirty days before the ship ever arrived. There was so much equipment coming into the ports that we didn't get our equipment as early as we thought we were going to.

So we ended up spinning our wheels for just about a month, trying to get our bearings and figure out who we were going to be working for. We knew we belonged to 3d MEDCOM, but at that time we were the only MEDEVAC unit in theater. Everybody was fighting to get a MEDEVAC unit assigned to them, but there was only the 498th in the theater. Later, the 507th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) and the 82d Medical Company (Air Ambulance) arrived, and it was decided that they would support the 3d Infantry Division and we would go to the Marines.

Once that decision was made, things started moving pretty quickly. We moved to Ali Al Salem Air Base, which was about two more hours to the north. They tucked us underneath the MAG 39 folks, headed up by COL Spencer, USMC. Once we linked up with those guys, we started the planning process. It seemed at that time kind of late in the game, because it was inevitable what was going to happen. The Marines were unfamiliar with how we worked. We didn't exactly know what type units they had, what training they had, how they normally do CASEVAC [casualty evacuation] or MEDEVAC [medical evacuation].

Q: Well, how do they do it normally?

A: They have a very effective system of CASEVAC that's integrated with them, unlike the Army that relies mostly on MEDEVAC, which is helicopters strictly dedicated to doing

medical evacuation. MAG 39, which we worked for, had three CH-46 squadrons. Those aircraft are much like our Chinooks. They are used for – you name it – carrying supplies, moving casualties, etc. They are armed with .50-caliber machine guns, and they use the three squadrons in a CASEVAC role. They were totally dedicated to that for on-call, and it worked very well.

The problem was they didn't have a lot of qualified medical personnel on their helicopters, so they were basically just moving casualties without treatment. But that's how they've done that business, probably since Vietnam.

Q: They did it that way in Vietnam. Weren't they putting corpsmen in some of their helicopters?

A: There were around 25 corpsmen across the entire 1st MEF to do that mission. They were kind of overwhelmed with the job that they were going to have to do with that few people, so they looked at us as kind of augmenting them. As things went on, they realized that we took the brunt of the mission there, and then the CASEVAC guys backed us up, much like the Army's General Support aviation does.

We had to set up meeting after meeting with all echelons within the Marines from the MEF. We did rehearsals with them on how to do medical evacuation operations. They were just completely unfamiliar with our methods. They just couldn't get their heads around the fact that we would go out single-ship, as far as point of injury, to pick up patients and bring them back. They thought that we were going to be used strictly in the role of hospital transfers of patients.

Their concept was that they were going to use their CASEVAC to do all of the front line evacuation, taking the casualties to a level two or level three hospital (Navy level two hospitals basically have the capability of the Army's level three). They thought they would utilize us just for patient transfers in the rear areas. [Marine doctrine includes a Surgical Company at level two that provides surgical care for a MEF; with three operating rooms and 60-bed capability.]

Q: Explain the differences in capability.

A: Level two is almost like the Forward Surgical Teams (FSTs) that we have. The Marines push those down to level two.

Q: Roughly 60 people or so?

A: I believe there's almost 120 or 150. They have a very robust level two system where they can do some serious stabilization.

Q: So it differs from our FST?

A: Right. It is much larger. It is approximately 30 containers worth of equipment.

Q: They even call it something different.

A: FRSS. The Marines are very good about pushing all their assets far forward. I think that's a function of their mission. They are not used to coming inland very far, and this was something new for them because they ended up pushing 250 miles into Baghdad as opposed to taking the beach and then letting the Army take over and push forward. This was something different for them. It took them a little while to understand our mission. I did OPD [Officer Professional Development] after OPD and briefings to explain, "Hey this is our bread and butter. Primarily we go to battalion aid stations, but we will go to point of injury if necessary to pick up folks."

They finally got it after awhile, but it took about a month of briefing everybody you could think of, going down to the units; talking to the surgeons and talking to the corpsmen down there about our capabilities and how we were going to do it.

Q: Did you practice loading?

A: We did. That's when we found out that we did want to use the carousel. I got all my smart guys within the company and we put together a package of how we wanted to do it without the carousel. We went out with the Marines and it was a big flop. So we went back to the normal standard configuration, and then we drilled that with them. They got pretty efficient.

Q: So you spent your entire time in support of the Marines?

A: The whole time. I won't say the cord was cut between us and 3d MEDCOM, but once we moved up to Ali Al Salem we didn't have a lot of exposure to them.

Q: Were you headquartered with the Marines?

A: Our headquarters was at Ali Al Salem Airbase, which is about 30 minutes west of Camp Doha. That's where MAG 39 was. The Marines were spread out all through Kuwait, but they called MAG 39 our Den Daddy. We weren't working for them but they were feeding us, protecting us, housing us; you know, taking care of basic stuff like that.

They had a great S2/S3 section and operations center where we could get threat briefs, threat information, and information to launch our missions. Once combat was getting ready to take place, we pushed a lot of our crews forward to work directly for the combat units up there as we normally would doctrinally.

Normally, we work in three-ship teams, and we push a team to each brigade. Since we

didn't have that kind of structure within the Marines, we sent six aircraft and crews with the 1st Marine Division to directly support that division and to go north with them.

We sent one three-ship team with the 1st (UK) Armoured Division, because the UK folks worked under the Marines in this particular operation. Our team worked with the UK Division Headquarters, and we supported them for about a week into the combat.

So we had quite a few different flavors going on over there. We worked with the UK for about a week when they took the Al-Faw Peninsula, which was right there on the northeastern border. Until those guys got up there and secured Basrah, we had our team working for them.

Q: I think they're still trying to secure Basrah.

A: Yes, they are. We had that one team working for them. Once that was done, the British weren't going to go any farther than that. So our team was pulled and put in direct support of Task Force Tarawa, which was another Marine unit. They are, I believe, a Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU); it is a brigade-size task force.

They had some armor and infantry folks, so that was kind of our bread and butter. Our team, which was headed up by CPT Jonathan M. Hartman, worked for Task Force Tarawa throughout the duration until we were relieved of the mission.

So that's how we operated during combat with those Marine units: six aircraft forward supporting the 1st Marine Division and three aircraft forward with Task Force Tarawa. The remaining six aircraft stayed back at Ali Al Salem and did the General Support (GS) mission – doing back hauls. Our forward team evacuated casualties to the level two facilities, where the patients were stabilized. Then our six aircraft in the rear – the ones that weren't broken or getting fixed – would go forward and pick up those patients and bring them back to the 28th CSH, or other level three medical capability that was back there, including the Kuwaiti Armed Forces Hospital.

Q: Were you running any patients to the [USNS] *Comfort*?

A: We didn't. Initially, 3d MEDCOM was planning on giving us the shore-to-ship mission as well, which was really odd. They were going to have two MEDEVAC companies supporting Fifth Corps, then they were going to have us supporting the Marines and, oh, by the way, we were also going to do the GS mission for Fifth Corps and the Marines and the shore-to-ship mission. They finally realized there was just not enough of us to go around.

There were five aircraft that had been left over from Operation Desert Spring – the 1042d guys out of Oregon. We trained them in deck landing qualification and got them on the hook, and they started doing that shore-to-ship mission.

Q: You mentioned Desert Spring.

A: Desert Spring was the stabilization mission in Kuwait from about 1995. It was normally a six-month rotation. Depending on how you look at it, they were fortunate or unfortunate enough to be there when this thing kicked off, and they got extended to support the war. It didn't make sense to send assets back when a war was getting ready to start. They did the shore-to-ship mission, and they kind of butted up to the rear of our area of operations. We'd evacuate folks back to level three, and they'd take them from shore to ship.

Q: Describe how it worked once the Marines kicked off and you started evacuating casualties.

A: Normally the way we will pull duty is folks will have eight hour shifts, and you can extend them to 12-hour shifts. That way you have continuous coverage throughout a 24-hour period of time. Of course, we had one team with Task Force Tarawa, and two teams for the Marine division.

The casualties never come in on a scheduled flow. They come in large groups, then there are short periods of down time in-between.

Crew endurance (or fighter management) issues were very difficult with that small number of aircraft and that many folks to support. We evacuated 740 casualties throughout the whole thing. We flew about 1,404 hours during the actual combat, and a total of almost 1,700 hours throughout the whole tour. That's well more than any other company did over there. So our guys were very busy. Just to give you a perspective: in three months we did about half of our annual flying hour program.

So the OPTEMPO was very high. We provided continuous coverage within the 1st Marine Division and Task Force Tarawa. Because of the conditions that the aircraft were flying in, they were breaking a lot. We broke over 20 windscreens just by cranking up the aircraft and blowing rocks back, smashing into the windscreen. Those of us in the rear were constantly bringing good aircraft up and flying the broken ones back to the Company's maintenance platoon.

Q: Do they make a stronger windscreen replacement?

A: I guess not. Glass was at a premium over there. It wasn't just us. It was all units. I mean, after we had been there probably three weeks, you couldn't find any glass at all. We were thinking engines were going to be the problem with FOD [Foreign Object Damage] – ingesting dirt and sand and stuff like that. But we only lost two engines. The big thing was glass windscreens, and that's because we were not flying from hard stand to hard stand. We were landing out there in the dirt in rocks and gravel.

Q: When did the Marines kick off? I'm assuming the 1st Marine Division became the lead element.

A: They did. The Marines kicked the thing off on March 20th. They actually started a little bit before that. There was a place just north of the border called Safwan Hill, which was an Iraqi OP [observation post] where they were keeping tabs on what was lined up against them across the border. The Marines' first objective was to take Safwan Hill. Basically, they wiped that place clean and then set up a refuel point there.

This was one great success we had that didn't involve any of our aircrews at all: my POL section, because we had HEMTT tankers. The HEMTT's an eight-wheel drive truck, so obviously it is cross-country capable. The Marines didn't have those trucks. Theirs (I forget what they called them) are not cross-country capable.

There were no real good roads going to Safwan Hill, and since we had been using our refueling guys back at Ali Al Salem to perform the garrison mission while we were training up, we loaned them out to MALS 39. MALS is a Marine Air Logistics Squadron, the support group for the MAG.

We loaned five of our HEMTTs to MALS 39 to provide the refueling mission, so when the Marines breached the border at Kuwait, our POL guys were leading the way. They drove up to Safwan Hill, once most of the enemy had been taken out, and set up the first refuel point for the entire MAW. There were three Marine helicopter MAGs in theater, plus a couple fixed-wing MAGs with F18s and Harriers, but our POL section set up the refuel point and did the refueling for all those Marine aircraft as well as all the U.S. Army aircraft that were stopping in at Safwan Hill to go north, and shoot, take supplies or whatever.

The POL section continued on with the Marines. We eventually linked up with them when the entire company jumped north as the fight got to Baghdad. Those guys pumped almost 500,000 gallons of fuel for the Marines, fueling all different kinds of aircraft. I mean, they were refueling Harriers; you name it, they did it. They did that because the Marines didn't have the all-wheel drive capability that our guys do and couldn't go to some of the places that they had to.

We've got SGT Jackson lined up to speak to you about his experience over there leading the POL Section.

Q: Yes, I'd like to hear about that.

A: He's got some great stories. When they did the breach into Iraq, there was a Marine Corps fire truck in the convoy that hit a land mine and was destroyed just in front of our trucks that were full of gas. There were some injuries, but I can't recall if anyone was

killed. That was right in front of our guys. They also took some mortar and artillery fire regularly. They were in the thick of it.

Q: Did they stay at Safwan Hill?

A: No, they didn't. Those guys jumped. The Marines set up Forward Area Rearm/Refuel Points (FARP)s all the way up to Baghdad. They probably had ten or twelve different ones throughout the operation. They'd stay at a location 24 maybe 36 hours, and then they'd pack up and jump, move forward. As the Marines moved forward, the FARPs were being set up right behind them.

Q: You guys were fully integrated with the Marines.

A: Yes. We were in there.

Q: You said earlier that this was the first time we've had an Army Dustoff unit that for all intents and purposes was part of a Marine unit. My guess is that this becomes a model for the future. Is that how the Marines see it?

A: We're hoping so. I know they were very pleased with our service. I don't see why they wouldn't want that in the future, because we were providing a service to them that they never had before, basically for free, and it worked very well. Their died-due-to-wounds rate was much lower. I can't remember exactly what the percentage had been before, but it was much lower this time. So it worked well. I think they'll probably want to use this in the future.

Q: What were the biggest differences in working with the Marine units versus Army units?

A: Probably the biggest thing that we learned was that when the Army develops aviation plans, they plan it down to the most minuscule detail. Sometimes when those plans are being executed, if something doesn't go exactly as planned, it causes a lot of wringing of the hands and gnashing of teeth trying to get things back on the plan.

The Marines don't do that. They don't operate in such a centralized manner. They take all their assets and basically throw them at the objective to see what they can accomplish. Talking with some of their attack guys, their Cobra pilots, I compared what they do with how the Army does things.

For example, you know we had that big raid of fifty Apaches around Karbala and Baghdad. That had been planned by the Army for three or four weeks. But the Marine Cobras were basically cut loose to just go knock out targets. They would get up in the morning, FARP their way up to Baghdad, and they'd stay there all day just shooting targets and talking to the DASC [Direct Air Support Center] for more business.

The DASC was located with the 1st Marine Division Headquarters. They had two of them: a forward (Jump) DASC, and a main DASC.

Q: They were leap-frogging?

A: Yes, they would leap-frog forward. The DASC – that's another thing that is very different how the Marines do business. The DASC controls everything that is going on within that sector – within the 1st Marine Division sector. You don't fly anywhere without talking to those guys. They wouldn't set up Standard Army Aviation Flight Routes (SAAFRs), per se, like the Army does, which is a route that is plotted on a map and tells you how to get from point A to point B.

They'd set up spider points – different check points – all over their entire air space. You would check in with the DASC, and they would tell you your mission. They would give you check points to hit while you were enroute to your destination, and you'd call them as you hit each check point. You'd proceed to pick up patients, drop off supplies or do whatever you had to do, and then they would control you all the way back. The Army doesn't really do anything like that. The DASC is almost like a super G3 air cell for the Marine division. That's basically how our crews were fed the missions.

Within the DASC they have a PET (Patient Evacuation Team); probably the closest thing we have to it is an MRO (Medical Regulating Office). The PET does all their regulating. The DASC received the mission from the unit that has injuries, and would call our team leader or PIC (Pilot in Command) of the crew on call and notify him of the mission. Meanwhile the PET is looking at the medical information, and trying to decide where that patient needs to go.

Q: What was the level of medical expertise in the PET?

A: The PET was headed up by a Navy lieutenant (an O-3). I believe the PET staff was all reservists. They were all medical, health care people. There were doctors, and they had some flight operations folks in there, but mostly it was Navy MSC officers. The DASC staff is all aviation specialties, because they not only do the MEDEVAC stuff, but they plan fire support and control the fixed wing aircraft as well; all the aviation support in their air space.

The PET will look at the level three hospitals, or wherever we are taking the patients, do the regulating piece, and tell the MEDEVAC crew, "Okay, once you pick them up, you need to go here."

Everything that we did was basically controlled by the DASC. They'd give us threat briefs which sometimes were accurate and sometimes weren't. They would give us all the information that we needed.

Q: Were you flying single-ship missions and hot LZ [landing zone] pick-ups?

A: That's another thing that we did that was different from the other air ambulance companies in Iraq with the same mission. Because it was such a large air space, and so many units to support, we could only afford to fly single-ship. Occasionally, we would call for gunship support if we were going into an area that was likely to be hot. We'd coordinate with the DASC to have F-18s on standby, or a CH-46 there as well as a gunship. The other Army MEDEVAC companies either flew with an Apache all the time beside them, or they flew with a sister ship.

Q: So the other air ambulance companies were all flying with gunship support?

A: Well, not always. From what I've been told, more likely than not they would have an Apache with them. If they didn't, it would be a sister ship. We didn't have that luxury. You know, flying single-ship we flew more than anybody else anyway. So we would have run the aircraft into the ground if we'd tried to fly two-aircraft missions.

Q: How about night missions?

A: We did the same thing.

Q: I've heard some comments about rules of engagement in Afghanistan prohibiting night missions. Have you heard anything like that?

A: I can't really speak for Afghanistan. We would do a risk assessment on every mission that was based on the urgency of the patient. If the guy's life, limb or eyesight didn't depend on it, it would be pushed off until morning, because a lot of time the visibility conditions and illumination were zero, and basically you were flying in a dirt cloud. You would be risking the entire crew to launch on some of those missions at night.

Q: Describe the weather and terrain.

A: Well, the terrain just south of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers is very flat and sandy, just what everybody pictures as desert. When the winds pick up, the visibility goes down to hardly anything. Once you get north of those two rivers there is more vegetation. They've got rice fields and different types of fields and crops that they are cultivating.

So the weather there wasn't quite as bad, but certainly in northern Kuwait and southern Iraq, we would get dust storms. There were probably three days during the war when we had to shut down aviation operations. I think it was around Day 10 of the invasion. I remember the news was calling it the tactical pause. Basically, that was done because of the weather; hardly any aviation was flying.

Once you got north of those rivers, it wasn't as bad. You still had dust storms, but you

could navigate. The big thing that we noticed north of those rivers were the wires, high tension wires, telephone wires. It just seemed almost diabolical, because those things were so coated with sand that at first we thought they were painted sand color. But it was just years of them sitting out there with dust storms.

All those wires were sand colored and you could not see them. There were certain areas where we would just maintain a minimum altitude because you didn't know whether you were flying over wires or not. That was certainly true around Baghdad, where you have poor weather to begin with. When you are flying under NVGs [night vision goggles] you've got those wires that you can't see. That was another thing. We used the ANVS-6 night vision goggles, which is older generation equipment. The Marines used the ANVS-9's, and they just couldn't get over the fact that we were out there flying single-ship with that older generation night vision equipment.

Q: How would you describe the difference between the Marine culture versus what you've been used to with the Army?

A: We did a little reading before we went over there about the Marine Corps ethos, to try to understand their mentality, and I'll tell you, it's different. We liked the difference. There's a lot good about it. I will tell you that almost down to a man, it seemed the Marines were ready for a fight. Everybody was looking for a fight. If you look at the way that the sector was broken down, most of the enemy was in the Marines' territory. The Marines got bogged down pretty much on day one, duking it out there at the border while 3d ID and V Corps were making the end run around to Baghdad.

That was the plan, to do that, but the Marines were not very willing to bypass things to move on. They wanted to destroy every enemy they could on the way north. Eventually, that one Marine division and its associated units destroyed eight Iraqi divisions on the way up to Baghdad.

Q: Good Lord.

A: They were itching for a fight. There are probably more differences than there are similarities. It was kind of funny when we decided that the company was going to move once the fight got up to Baghdad. It was almost a five-hour flight from where we were in Kuwait to Baghdad, so we were really getting stretched beyond our level of support. We needed to move the company up. The Marines were going to do the same thing, and move some headquarters and support elements up closer around the Al Kut area, which is just north of the Tigris River.

MAG 39 decided it was going to jump most of its elements up to An Numiniyah, which was about 250 miles by ground from where we were.

Q: Is An Numiniyah south and east of Baghdad?

A: Right. You could really tell when they started planning that. The Marines were not used to going that far inland, but they put together a great plan. The convoy and the security for getting everything there worked out great. But you could really tell they were out of their element in pushing that far inland. Normally they are used to taking the beach and getting that mission done. Then the Army takes over and pushes forward, and the Marines go back to the boat.

You could see that they were not all that familiar with how to do it, but it was very successful. We convoyed all of our company: put everything on flatbeds, got the security together and went with them all the way, 250 miles through some of the tough areas, such as Nasiriyah, where they had a lot of action. That was never an area they had fully secured, but they drove right through there. That's where the 507th Maintenance Company set up maintenance about Day 10 when those folks were ambushed and captured.

Q: What date was that?

A: We got to An Numiniyah on the 8th of April and stayed there until the 23d, until things started winding down. At that time, 3d MEDCOM was talking about rotating us out and having another unit relieve us of the mission. Then we would be redeployed back to the States.

Q: You were digitized?

A: Yes. I guess I'm old school and I didn't think it would work that way, but if we hadn't had that we would have just been out of luck.

Q: Laptops to the front?

A: Yes. We would have been completely out of the loop. I mean, our teams didn't have laptops, but when they were attached in Baghdad to the DASC they had access to them. So the team leader would go in there several times a day and shoot me some flash traffic, saying, "This is what I need, or this is what we're doing, or we've got these problems." It worked well.

Q: How about sustained operations? Were there difficulties with sleep deprivation and that sort of thing?

A: Certainly the forward deployed crews were very stretched for about the first 25 or 30 days of the war, because they were flying a lot. Our normal peacetime limit for flight time is eight hours during the day and six hours at night, but I was having to extend crews out to thirteen hours, fourteen hours. They were very busy. We did our best to rotate guys out. We had our little pool of folks in the headquarters – my battle captains and

staff who were doing the mission with us in the rear. When guys were getting too burned up in the front, we'd send somebody forward to let them come back for a couple days to refit, to sleep in a cot and to get a warm meal, because the Marines didn't have a lot of that up there. We'd give them a break and then send them back. Obviously, you are not flying in the best of conditions as it is, and then when you are so tired you can't stand up, that's not a good thing.

Q: Any particularly memorable characters you ran into supporting the Marines?

A: The XO of the Marine Air Group, LTC Hudson, we called Frisco (not in front of him) because he was from San Francisco. He was a super guy. He gave us a really hard time, but just in a joking kind of way. I'm telling you, he gave us all the support we could stand. He was really the guy that made things happen for us, and when we had issues – hangar space to work on aircraft, or things like that – he was the one who came to our rescue and stood up for us when the other Marines would say, "Oh, those are Army guys, let's not give them that." Or, "Let's give them a hard time about that." He would come to our defense.

Q: Did you have much communication with the MEDCOM once you were attached to the Marines?

A: We sent them SITREPs, but that was really it. They didn't try to control a lot of stuff that we were doing. They were controlling the general support missions, the shore-to-ship missions in the rear. They basically cut us free to do what we needed to do for the Marines.

Q: Were you evacuating any Iraqi prisoners of war?

A: We did. We evacuated 126 EPWs, and 118 Iraqi civilians as well.

Q: Any particular comments about those missions?

A: Most of them were so severely injured they weren't talking, or were very serious litter patients that were unconscious. There were a few times where we'd also evacuate family members with them. On one mission I took a father with a son who had been shot. But mostly they were just very seriously injured. There were no real issues with security, needing armed guards and stuff like that, because they were too injured to do anything.

Q: Did you have any other contact with the civilian populace other than the patients you evacuated?

A: Well, we'd see them around the small towns, and there were a lot of refugees. A couple of days into the war, when we'd be going north or coming back evacuating patients,

you'd see them walking up and down the road. They all were waving white flags. I don't know if they understood the Red Cross symbol initially or not, but they were worried about getting shot up walking around.

Q: Any generalized reactions to the Iraqi people?

A: Where we were, we didn't have a lot of exposure to them, even when we moved up to Al Numiniyah at Three Rivers (which was the name of the FARP that we were at). The Marines pretty much kept them away. Our only exposure was during overflights, seeing them there.

Q: We were talking about the facilities for the 498th here at Fort Benning.

A: As I said, this hangar here is the oldest one on the airfield.

Q: It's rustic.

A: Yes, it is.

Q: Any idea when it was built? World War II?

A: I couldn't tell you. It was probably right after that, I imagine. We also have a loaner hangar that we use occasionally – which is that one over there – if we have big hail storms or bad weather, that we can put additional aircraft in. We can squeeze six in the one we have here, or we can fold the blades and put even more in if there is a really bad storm or something.

We're the FORSCOM Master of Aviation Readiness award winner for three years in a row for having the highest OR [operational readiness] rate out of any CONUS-based MEDEVAC unit, and about ten percent above the Army's average. Well, right now we are at zero percent, and that's no surprise because we flew them so hard over there during Iraqi Freedom. That's what the other units are at, too. When you fly the helicopters that hard, that long, and in such bad conditions, they get so dirty and so many broken things on them, that we limped them to the port in Kuwait and then limped them back from the port at Charleston. They've been down since then.

Now my guys are feverishly working to get them back up. We're making some headway, and we'll probably have two or three up this week. But right now we've got zero available, which is the first time I'm sure that's ever happened in this unit.

Q: What's the principle problem you're dealing with?

A: Well, it's just an accumulation of a lot of things that we couldn't fix because of the OPTEMPO over there. There is a lot of cleaning to be done. We had to clean them up to

get them past Customs to get them out of the port, but once we got them back here and started pulling panels and plates off, we realized how dirty they were. I mean, you can shovel dirt out of some of the areas of the aircraft where it ingested it by flying in such bad conditions.

While we were over there, we waived almost all of the normal, scheduled inspections, except for a 500 hour phase – you have to do those. We did four combat phases while in Iraq. Those basically inspect the most critical pieces of the aircraft to keep it in the air. We would fix those things and then push them out the door.

We were flying aircraft that we wouldn't, for safety reasons, under any circumstances fly back here. So we have a lot of work to do, because we rode them so hard. It's going to be months before we are fully recovered.

Q: What's the most problematical component of the aircraft?

A: Well, initially the most problems we've had are electrical gremlins. When we've taken everything apart, washed everything and put all those components back together, you'll have more electrical problems than you know what to do with. Getting those fixed is a very tedious problem. You start at point A and you trace the problem all the way down to the very end and you know it's somewhere in between. Electrical problems are probably the biggest thing that we've had.

Our engines have been degraded a lot. I mentioned that we only lost a couple to FOD, but they have degraded significantly from ingesting so much sand. We are going to be buying a lot of new engines to get them back up to speed and fully powered.

Blades are pretty damaged. We used blade tape. That was something learned during Desert Storm, that the sand erodes the spinning blades very quickly. So they put blade tape on this time, but they still get damaged. You get sand jammed up underneath the blade tape and it just eats the blade away.

Q: What is the blade tape like?

A: It is almost like a tire inner tube. It is put on with adhesive, around the leading edge of the blade. The sand hits the tape and doesn't actually strike the metal. But it doesn't last forever, and you have to reapply it all the time. We got to the point where there was just not enough time to keep reapplying blade tape, because you have to let the aircraft sit for awhile to let that stuff dry. So we just kept flying them, and now we've got a lot of eroded blades to deal with.

Q: Is most of the maintenance being done by your own maintenance team?

A: Some of it. They are conducting now what they call the Reset plan. It is very similar to

STIR, the program after Desert Storm, but Reset is supposed to get the aircraft reset back to its condition that it was before it deployed. They are only allowing so many aircraft into the Reset program at one time. We were fortunate enough to get four of ours in the program down at Hunter Army Airfield, near Savannah, where the work is being done by contractors.

We have our own maintenance contract team here from Lockheed, and I'll toot their horn. Those guys are the foundation of the maintenance success in this unit. I mean, they have been a huge help to us, and they are doing a reset on two aircraft here. Then we have two more that we sent up to our parent battalion at Fort Bragg, because our sister unit, the 57th, is deployed to Iraq, and we're using their contact team to do the resets.

The remainder we're working on here ourselves, just basically getting them cleaned up and back into flyable condition. But they will not be reset yet.

Q: Do you have 91Ws assigned? [The newly revised enlisted medical specialty, Health Care Specialist, that replaced the 91B and 91C.] How are they working out? I understand there is a difference between transitioned and non-transitioned 91Ws – those who have been formally trained in the revised specialty, including emergency medical technician (EMT) training.

A: Generally in units like this you get the cream of the crop, so most have been transitioned before they get here. They've had that additional medical training, so that's one thing that we don't have to worry about. All of our guys, except for the new ones who have come in since we got back, are EMT-I [Emergency Medical Technician-Intermediate] qualified, and we handle that requirement. EMT-I is a requirement for our MAST mission here at Fort Benning. I think we are one of the last MEDEVAC units that does MAST. We service twenty Georgia and Alabama counties around here that don't have any local EMS capability. So it is a requirement of the MAST program that our guys be at least EMT-I qualified. We have a couple of paramedics as well.

Q: How many MAST missions do you get on a monthly basis?

A: We've not yet picked up the mission since we got back, but routinely, MAST is really our bread and butter here. We get a couple missions a week. You would think on an installation this large, with the U.S. Army Airborne School drop zone, Ranger training, and the 3d Infantry Division, that there'd be a lot more injuries. But MAST is really the big thing.

Q: Was there a shift in how you had to cover that training after the training deaths of the Rangers several years ago?

A: There was. After the incident with the Rangers, which I believe was in 1995, they did a big investigation with some recommendations on how to provide better coverage. At that

time, we had a UH-1 [Iroquois "Huey", Vietnam era utility helicopter] aircraft pulling their MEDEVAC coverage. The Rangers decided right off the bat, "Hey, we want the most modernized MEDEVAC equipment that we've got." So it was dictated that UH-60s would provide that support from then on out.

That's a mission that is farmed out to the 18th Airborne Corps, then makes its way down through the chain of command. Between us and the 57th Air Ambulance Company (our sister company at Fort Bragg), we rotate coverage in the different Ranger training areas. We cover Fort Benning with our assets here. We cover the mountain camp at Dahlonega, Georgia with one aircraft at a time, and then Eglin Air Force Base, Florida – where they do the jungle swamp phase – with two aircraft at a time, because they do some Airborne OPS down there and there's a couple of periods where they say they need two aircraft.

They've tried since then to get two aircraft up at Dahlonega, but FORSCOM did a big study and out of all the installations that FORSCOM provides MEDEVAC support, Dahlonega and Eglin had the least number of injuries that required MEDEVAC aircraft. So right now there is one at Dahlonega and two at Eglin. We will probably start picking up that mission in another month or so.

It is good training, though. Our guys get up there in the mountains, so it's different terrain from what we're used to here at Fort Benning. It's good training to send folks up there.

Q: Did you think that you were prepared for what you encountered when you got to Iraq?

A: At least in the MEDEVAC community, I don't think you will ever feel that you are fully prepared, but in reality you are prepared to do your mission. The reason is that most MEDEVAC units have such a high OPTEMPO in garrison covering these different installations, that they are mission ready. However, because of their commitments they are not routinely able to set up an habitual training relationship with who they would most likely support.

Q: And the Marines were an example of that.

A: Right. It was kind of odd. Being here [at Fort Benning], we're kind of aligned with the 3d ID. We always thought that if we go to war, it's going to be supporting 3d ID. Well, we didn't get that when we went to Iraq, and had we been training with those guys it wouldn't have done any good because we were with the Marines.

But that's across the board in MEDEVAC companies. They are so busy doing their garrison mission. It makes sense for us to do that: we're here, we might as well be supporting the Rangers. We want to do that, but we also want to train for our wartime mission, and sometimes we don't feel like we get enough time to actually do that.

We have FTX's. We do METL [Mission Essential Task List] training as much as we can, and we try to get integrated with our higher headquarters. But if we didn't have this tremendous garrison mission, we'd have more time to set up those relationships with the unit that we'd support in combat.

Now the Marine Corps thing, that was probably the one that nobody would have ever expected – that we would be supporting the Marines during wartime. The good thing was once we got over there we were afforded the opportunity, for about a month and a half, to sit down with those guys and set up systems and train their folks so we could be efficient once the action started.

Q: Did you all get Marine Corps tatoos while you were there?

A: No. I think a few guys have gotten them since we've been back. But they loved it. I know I wouldn't trade the experience for anything and I think most of my folks are the same way. We were more proud of doing that mission with the Marines over there than probably any other one we could have been given.

Q: Well, that sure is "jointness."

A: Yes.

Q: How was it going here at Fort Benning in terms of family support: pluses, minuses?

A: No real serious problems. This is my third time getting deployed like this. I was gone for Desert Shield/Desert Storm [1989/1990] and also Uphold Democracy in Haiti [1994]. I'd seen some real horror stories, with not just the rear detachment, but with some of the families and things going on, so I was very concerned about that.

We had a good plan in place and a strong FRG [Family Readiness Group], so we really didn't have too many big problems.

Q: Anyone non-deployable?

A: We had a few non-deployables. We left twelve folks back here, some of which were non-deployable. We also left some strong folks to send us things that we needed and to run issues with the families if there were any. My rear detachment commander was CW4 Lacroix, who is also my Safety Officer. He had been permanently grounded at the time. I didn't want to leave him back, because he is a safety officer and I didn't want to go over there without one. (We designated somebody when we got over there.) I left him back as a Rear Detachment Commander, and he did a super job. SGT Williams was his NCOIC. Super job.

Q: That was a lesson learned as units moved out of Europe for Desert Storm. You'd better

leave someone back who's first-class. It's hard because they want to go, but you need someone strong. Otherwise, it gets messy. Were those non-deployables held back for medical reasons?

A: Virtually all were medical. I think I had one who was UCMJ, a chapter case who was being chaptered out of the Army. But all the rest were medical.

Q: Any pregnancies?

A: No pregnancies, which is unusual. In this unit we say, "If you don't want to have a baby, don't drink out of the water fountains." I don't know what it is, but I think it is because our guys are routinely gone so much that we crank out a lot of babies. While we were gone, we had family members deliver a baby a month the entire time we were there. For a 150-man company, that seems like a lot. I don't know if it is average or not.

Q: What percentage of the troop strength is female?

A: I'd say probably 30 percent was female.

Q: Any particular challenges?

A: They did fine.

Q: How about medical, legal, personnel support for your deployment?

A: Fort Benning is very efficient with pushing folks out and processing folks back, because they have the CRC here and they send a lot of folks to the Reserve units. A lot of Reserve and National Guard folks are sent to Fort Benning to get their POR (Processed for Overseas Replacement) taken care of along with all their medical screening, legal and other stuff. They are really efficient at pushing folks out.

Q: How about logistics in the theater?

A: That was a challenge, because we were working for the Marines and their system is completely different from ours. The hub of all logistics for us was at Camp Doha, which, while we were at Ali Al Salem, was about 30 minutes away, and that wasn't bad. But we had to either fly aircraft or send a convoy there every day to pick up parts and supplies, and all our admin stuff was done through there.

So we were constantly running back through Doha. The Marines couldn't figure that out, because they didn't own anything in Doha. The Marines had all their support on boats out in the bay, and they would fly their CH-53 helicopters back and forth every day bringing supplies forward. They would take them all the way forward to the division units up front in Iraq as well.

So, we weren't integrated with their logistics system as much as we would like to be, because our stuff wasn't on the boat out there. We had to basically take care of it ourselves – go backwards to get it, and then bring it forward. So there were some real challenges for the men. That was hard.

Q: How about medical items?

A: During the train-up in the month that we had prior to combat operations, we did a good job of setting up systems for medical equipment exchange with the level three and level two hospitals that we were going to be taking patients to. We had a few minor problems, but all in all it went very well. When we would show up, they would have what we needed to switch out.

Q: And food?

A: Marines eat a lot of rice. I guess the main staple in the Army food service system is chili mac, but the Marines eat rice like we eat chili mac. It was rice every meal, chicken and rice. Our teams that were forward ate MREs a lot. The only time they got to eat hot meals was when they came back and switched out with the main company headquarters. The MAG mess hall where our company headquarters was located was called the snake pit. Eventually they got three hot meals a day running.

That brings up another point: the Marines are not big on personal comfort items, like the Army is sometimes. Initially they had no cots, and they weren't worried about air conditioning and things like that. Some of that focus is good. They were concerned about getting up to the front and getting into the fight.

It took them a little while to make things comfortable for folks in the MAG area, whereas the Army sometimes brings all that stuff with them and sets up as they go.

Q: How about individual equipment, for example MOPP gear?

A: We had the new JSLIST and we spent a lot of time in that. The first day the war kicked off, I think we got in and out of that stuff probably twelve times. It is a good system though. Much better than the old CPOG.

Q: What about individual flight equipment?

A: We had the new ALSE, which is basically the survival vest. It's got a mirror, first aid kit, survival knife and all that stuff. We got this right before we went over there. It is extremely uncomfortable.

There was so much gear that you had to wear that it almost got to the point of affecting

the mission. By the time you strapped on your protective armor – with the JS chemical suit on underneath that, then your body armor and the survival vest – you had to take the back cushion out of the seat to actually get in and to have enough room to operate the controls. The cyclic would literally be pressed up against your stomach because you had so much gear on. I understand the reason for having all that, but it got to a point where, especially in the heat, it was just almost unbearable. It really affected doing the mission.

Q: How was the mail?

A: Mail worked OK. Again, the Marines had their own system. Everything gets flown to a ship. Then the Marines come and get it by helicopter and take it directly to the Marine units. We had to work through the Army and Air Force system, because Ali Al Salem was really an Air Force base. We were outside the gate there, but we would go up to Ali Al Salem and work with the postal system.

It was hit or miss. Packages took a long time. The regular letter mail started out slow but eventually you could get things within a couple of weeks.

Q: Did the troops have access to e-mail?

A: We did have e-mail. Also, we ran a morale phone line in our operations section. We let folks come up and call DSN through the RTO here at the Company Headquarters, and we'd forward calls to family members.

Q: Was that just a local call in the States?

A: Yes. We let them do that from about seven at night until six, seven o'clock in the morning, something like that. So at night there were a lot of people hanging around making phone calls. For email we had, I think, five NIPR drops, five separate computers that we could use for that, so we left one open pretty much all the time so folks could come up there and do web-based e-mail. We had access. Not as much as we wanted, but it was there.

Q: How was the morale?

A: It was good. It was difficult when we first got there, because when we were waiting on the equipment they kept us housed in a warehouse with not much for folks to do. We did some basic CTT type training – brushing up on stuff, and NBC training to get things ready, but folks started tiring after a month of that. Once we got the mission and moved to Al Salem and started leaning forward in the foxhole, it got much better. When the war kicked off, everybody was raring to go.

Q: Any disciplinary problems?

A: Yeah, a couple small ones, but all in all, the folks did great over there. I think it was a function of once we got over there and got busy these people really enjoyed doing their job, and there was just not enough time to really get in trouble.

Q: Drugs, drinking?

A: No, none that we know about. No drugs, no drinking. Stuff is really hard to get over there. You know, Kuwait is a dry country.

Q: Does the military prohibit or limit beer and that kind of thing?

A: General order number one was no alcohol.

Q: Okay.

A: And obviously no drugs. There may have been some floating around. I heard the MAG commander talking about a Marine battalion that got permission to bring alcohol forward. They had one day where they let every soldier drink two beers, or something like that. I am sure it was a big morale boost for them, but it was very controlled.

Q: How about the redeployment home: pluses, minuses?

A: It took them longer than we wanted to deploy us back. There was a lot of confusion, because once the main part of combat was over and they started designating units to redeploy back, there was a big rush to get to port and get everything cleaned up and go. We were one of the first units that was allowed to do that. We got our equipment cleaned up, and then it took about two weeks (it seemed like forever) to get a boat lined up and to get things set up.

So we were all packed up and ready to go, but just sitting there waiting on the word to get on the boat. Once we got the word, things picked back up again and it was really smooth. We did a lot of the personnel and redeployment requirements, all those mandatory classes on that end, so once we got back here there would be minimal stuff to do until the equipment showed up. But once we got back here we found out, "Well, I know you did it all over there," but we needed to do it again to satisfy the Fort Benning folks. So, we did double tap [as in a double key-stroke on a computer mouse] a lot of this stuff. We had a ten-day re-integration program with classes and mandatory things that had to be done to prep folks to get ready to go on leave. But that ten day period let folks get a little more settled, instead of just hopping off the plane and cutting everybody loose.

Q: How was the welcoming ceremony?

A: We had a fantastic welcoming ceremony. We did it here at the hangar, and there was probably three to five hundred people. There was a large crowd.

Q: A lot of babies?

A: Yes. A lot of babies. News crews were here. They had a large spread of food, and the post band was here. We flew into Warner Robins Air Force Base, got off the planes and got on the buses for the two hour drive.

We got here at about 1800 in the evening. The band was playing, and it was a great welcome home. They had a guest speaker that nobody could hear, because all the family members were clapping, applauding, and cheering.

They lined us all up in formation and then basically the troops just bum rushed into the crowd. They didn't listen to the speaker at all, but pushed on in to hug family members. So yes, it was a great reunion.

Q: How about re-integration into the families?

A: We did really well. There have been a couple of small problems, but I guess that is to be expected. Like I said, we had that cool-down period of ten days. Nobody liked that: "Okay, I just got back from six month wartime deployment, I don't want to spend ten more days with the guys I've been sleeping in a tent with for months." But I think it really worked well. It eased folks back into family life. We did half-day schedules knocking the classes out, and then once that was done, we put most everybody out on block leave and gave them anywhere from two to three weeks.

Q: How was the chaplain support?

A: Chaplain support was good over there. We had several different chaplains within the Marines and the Army folks tried to help us out as best they could as well. Here, there was great access to the FRG.

Q: It doesn't sound like the families had a major problem in coping.

A: Well, you know, I am sure it was difficult. It was difficult for everybody. But no real major problems.

Q: Were there divorces, family abuse problems, or anything like that?

A: We've had a couple of abuse problems since we got back.

Q: What rank?

A: One's an NCO and one's a soldier.

Q: Physical abuse?

A: Yes.

Q: Wife beating?

A: Yes.

Q: Was this precipitated by the deployment or was it the kind of thing that was pre-existing?

A: Both had a history, but I'm sure the deployment had a little bit to do with it, just getting folks reintegrated back. A unit leaves and the spouses have to get very independent and run things by themselves. Then they introduce the military member back into the home and sometimes it is hard to let go of what you were running before.

Q: Weren't there some bad incidents at Fort Bragg recently?

A: That's what drove the whole ten day re-integration program. It was dictated to us by both the 36th Engineers here and Fort Bragg. We came up with our own plan that we were going to do in five days. When we submitted it, they said, "No, the new standard is ten days."

Q: So you reported for duty each day.

A: We would do PT in the morning plus a half-day's worth of work. They do get plenty of off time, but it does help ease folks back into being home.

Q: In the Army of the '30s those were "tropical hours." For example, in Panama they worked in the morning and that was it.

A: I just know when we came back from Desert Storm (when I was a lieutenant), I think we worked two half-days after that and then they cut everybody loose for three weeks on block leave, and there were all kinds of problems. So I think it makes a difference.

Q: So we did learn a lesson. Overall, were there any particularly unusual or remarkable events in this deployment?

A: Just seeing what the folks did, some of the conditions they were flying in, and the mission that they had, and bringing everybody back basically without a scratch – everybody in this unit still can't get over it. We didn't have a single bullet hole in any aircraft. Our guys were flying in the thick of it out there. As you talk to folks today, I'm sure you'll probably hear that several times.

Q: It's not to say they were not shooting at you.

A: Oh, they were shooting at us; I guarantee it.

Q: They just weren't hitting.

A: Yes.

Q: It must be that protective coating you've got.

A: It worked.

Q: Any unforgettable characters or scenes?

A: Got me blocked now.

Q: While you're thinking about that, has there been a requirement for everyone to have a baseline physical exam?

A: Not a full blown physical like the aviators get on an annual basis. They did a medical screening: updated all the shots and did basically a survey, asking if you had problems with this or that. That's, I'm sure, stemming from the Gulf War Illness type thing – because we may get Agent Orange or Gulf War Syndrome. You had the opportunity, if you wanted, to get a full-blown physical. Most folks didn't, though, because I don't think anybody's had any symptoms.

Q: So that wasn't imposed across the board?

A: No, not a mandatory exam. When I came back from Desert Storm, we had several people that got really sick. In fact, our First Sergeant got very ill, and ended up getting out of the military. We've not had any thing like that.

Q: And they couldn't figure out why?

A: No, just the classic Gulf War Illness.

Q: Have any unforgettable characters sprung to mind?

A: Short of the ones that I own within the unit here? I am very fortunate in this unit. I tell them all the time that this unit is just imbedded with all-stars. We've got some very high-powered folks who took a very difficult mission, one that had never been done before, and ran with it. Did very well. Got some good folks.

Q: Thank you very much for covering your experiences, MAJ Gentry.

A: Sure.

Q: And thank you on behalf of the Surgeon General's Medical History Office, and our country.

A: Well, thank you.

Q: I'm back with MAJ Gentry. We got to chatting, and there were a couple of stories that Greg had about dealing with the Marines. Could you recount the story of the latrines?

A: I was talking about how formal the rank structure is in the Marines, more so than in the Army. We had been in Ali Al Salem for about two weeks, and we were trying to put things together and get ready to start the war. I'd been trying to get in to see the colonel, the O-6 commander of the MAG. The XO (a lieutenant colonel) of the MAG basically ran everything. They would bring the big problems to the O-6, but the XO was the point man on everything, and just seemed to have a much larger role in the Marines than XOs normally do in the Army.

I'd been talking to the XO and saying, "I need to get in to see the commander, introduce myself and tell him, 'I'm the MEDEVAC guy. If you've got any problems, this is what I'm here for. I'm here to support you,' and give him the whole party line." He said, "Okay, we're going to have a meeting this afternoon anyway. Come on by for that."

So we went and all the other commanders were there, all the Marine Corps squadron commanders who were subordinate to the group. They were all lieutenant colonels [a squadron is a battalion equivalent] and I was sitting there. The Colonel walked in and did nothing for about 30 minutes but chew us out over some very small, minute things. He didn't introduce himself. It was his first exposure not only to me, but to several of the squadron commanders that had come from different posts. He just proceeded to rip us up and down over certain things.

One of the funniest things was that he was very concerned about graffiti in the latrines. He said if it didn't stop, that he was going to take all the doors off the latrines and we'd be forced to go in there without any doors on them. It was just kind of funny, because all the latrines were right out in front of the headquarters, right out in front of all the working areas and everything. I just can't imagine that in the Army – having our soldiers sitting on those latrines with no doors on them.

Another humorous thing that we got chewed out about (and we found out later who it was that did it) was a big safety issue with ground-guiding vehicles throughout the camp. The British guys (I guess it is their policy), when they ground-guide vehicles, run at a dead sprint. So the vehicles are moving pretty fast trying to keep up with these guys.

Q: We're talking armored vehicles, right?

A: Well, no. Humvees, jeeps, anything you have. Within the tented area at the compound where we were staying – it was called the life support area – they wanted vehicles moving with ground guides in front of them. The 1st (UK) Armoured Division and the Desert Rats were there, and a few other folks who also fell under the Marines and the Desert Rats were there with us at Ali Al Salem.

Q: The Desert Rats are?

A: The UK 7th Armoured Brigade. Mostly what they had at Ali Al Salem were the support vehicles: Land Rovers, a type about half the size of the Humvee – Land Rover Defender jeeps, basically. Their policy is they run when they ground guide, so at night you'd see guys just sprinting around the compound with this vehicle tearing after them. It just seemed to defeat the purpose.

Well, they had caught a guy late at night who was ground-guiding his vehicle in thong underwear. So we had this O-6 telling a bunch of O-5s and an O-4 that you will not ground-guide your vehicles in a thong, that you must be fully dressed to do it. We kind of thought that was humorous.

One more thing. We were talking about the rank structure being so formal in the Marines. When we first got there, we started putting dibs on space in the operations center where we wanted to put our headquarters. The Seabees were there from the Navy, and were building things like crazy.

There was a female Marine corporal who was in charge of a detail of a couple Marine PV2s and E-3s. CPT Clyde and I walked by as a PFC had done something that the corporal did not want him to do. She was reading the riot act to him like a sergeant major. It was just incredible. I mean, he was standing at parade rest, all locked up, and she was in his face telling him how to hammer nails that he wasn't doing properly. She was just ripping him up one side and down the other, and he was saying "Yes, ma'am, yes ma'am." CPT Clyde said, "Look at that, sir. That's absolutely beautiful." Because you just can't imagine an Army E-4 directing an E-3 or E-2 like that. But it was done there by the Marines.

So they take rank very seriously. That's a good thing.

[end of interview]

AMEDD ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM
INTERVIEW OIF 061

INTERVIEW WITH CPT JEREMY M. MCKENZIE
AIR AMBULANCE PLATOON LEADER
498TH MEDICAL COMPANY (AIR AMBULANCE)

CONDUCTED BY
COL RICHARD VAN NESS GINN, USA, RET.
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA
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OFFICE OF MEDICAL HISTORY
OFFICE OF THE SURGEON GENERAL, U.S. ARMY/
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. ARMY MEDICAL COMMAND
FALLS CHURCH, VIRGINIA

Q: I am speaking with CPT Jeremy M. McKenzie, who during the Iraq operation was a flight platoon leader and is currently the company's executive officer.

CPT McKenzie, let's start with your background – where you went to school, where you're from, and your family.

A: I'm from Medina, New York, a small town near Buffalo. I went to school at State University of New York at Brockport. I majored in history and minored in military science.

I graduated summa cum laude. I went from there to the basic course in 1998, to Korea for a year, and then came back and went to flight school. I've been with the 498th ever since.

Q: And family?

A: I've got a wife.

Q: No kiddies?

A: No kids. Two dogs.

Q: Were you in ROTC?

A: Yes. I was a two-year scholarship winner and graduated as a distinguished military student.

Q: Very good. Think you'll make a career of it?

A: Still up in the air.

Q: Do you think your training prepared you for what you encountered in Iraq?

A: Actually, yes. I was kind of surprised. For the first couple of days of the war, especially when everything started, running to a bunker in the MOPP [Military Oriented Protective Posture, the biological-chemical protective suit] was weird. But the actual flying mission in Iraq seemed very much like the exercises we performed at both of my JRTC exercises. I've been to the JRTC twice with this unit doing the same sort of mission, and it was actually surprising how close it was. What we did at JRTC was just like what we were doing in Iraq. We received a mission, took off and flew it very close to combat conditions, minus the danger factor. It really was dangerous in Iraq, versus just a little yellow light going off if you got hit with something [a simulated hit]. JRTC training was very good.

Q: Describe the flight platoon, what it does, and what your responsibilities were.

A: The flight platoon basically owns all the aircrew members: the crew chiefs, the pilots and the medics, except for the few company headquarters officer pilots and the maintenance pilots in the maintenance platoon.

The flight platoon does all the flight scheduling. There are four teams in the platoon: three forward support MEDEVAC teams [FSMT], and an area support MEDEVAC team [ASMT]. Each team consists of three aircraft and three crews, and within those three crews you have at least one IP and one maintenance pilot. And you usually have a team leader.

A team leader is usually a First Lieutenant, but since the Army's gone to a quick promotion system, I had two Captains and one CW3 who were the team leaders for the forward support teams. Each team has an E-6 team sergeant, who is usually a medic. In all three of our FSMT teams there were medics.

The ASMT has the remaining aircraft and crews, and they fly more of an area mission.

By Army doctrine, each of the three FSMTs is supposed to support a brigade, and the ASMT is supposed to support the division rear. But the way we fought in Iraq, it was a little different.

Q: Well, let's get into that. I understand you all ended up being Marines for this war. How did that go?

A: That went pretty well. CPT Jon Hartman's team was the third FSMT. At the beginning of the war he was just south of the Iraqi border, near Basrah, in the middle of the Kuwaiti desert really. He was supporting the 1st (UK) Armoured Division for the first week in the war, flying missions out of Basrah.

The other two forward support MEDEVAC teams were CPT Salvetti's team two, and CW3 Barnett's team one. Those two teams were co-located with and were supporting the 1st Marine Division. They were supporting out of another location than CPT Hartman's team.

CPT Salvetti's team ended up jumping over fifteen times, all the way from the Kuwaiti desert – actually from Ali Al Salem Airbase – all the way up to Baghdad. He jumped about every 24 to 36 hours, so he was very busy.

We developed a package [of equipment and supplies to take forward] at the beginning of the war. I sat down with the three forward team leaders, along with my platoon sergeant and the key NCOs, and asked, "What are we going to do for the package? This is

something different than what we've done before. We used to go to JRTC, and maybe we jumped once. But the way it looks, you are going to support this Marine Expeditionary Force as it goes all the way to Baghdad. How are we going to support that? You know, we don't want to bring lots of equipment." So we set up a package, but it was still too heavy.

About two to three days into the war, after they had jumped a couple times, CPT Salvetti called me and said, "We've got to dump all this tentage and equipment." Eventually we picked up their equipment, and the first and second teams lived out of their aircraft for the entire time.

The third team lived a little bit better. CPT Hartman's team, the one that supported the UK Division, stayed in place for about a week. They jumped, I think, four or five times. They jumped up to Al Kut in the end; but at first they supported the UK Division, so they set up tents. Then they got it really good; after they moved from the UK Division, they went to support Task Force Tarawa, which was close to a division-sized Marine task force.

With Tarawa they got it really good. The Marines ended up giving us some two-man tents, and we ended up taking back the Army tentage from CPT Hartman's team too, because it was all way too heavy. It was much more in the peacekeeping style, when you set it up and stay in one place. It wasn't very mobile for twelve guys, so they got two-man tents and lived pretty good for the rest of the war.

Q: Where did you position yourself?

A: With the Area Support MEDEVAC Team, which flew out of Ali Al Salem and Kuwait, this is where it is sketchy; I don't remember the dates. We went up to An Numaniyah, which is an airfield right here [points to map]. We eventually moved the whole company up there and stayed up there for about a week and a half.

The war was essentially over at that point. We moved up there as the Marines were moving up into Tikrit, but the war was basically over. It was won. We were in Baghdad very solid, and the majority of the fighting was over by the time we got to An Numaniyah.

But the majority of the time we were down here at Ali Al Salem, and the ASMT flew out of there. There was a hospital near Jalibah. We evacuated patients out of there, and brought them back to Kuwait as part of the ASMT. The big part of the area team's responsibility was re-supplying the FSMTs as they went forward, when they were at An Nasiriyah and then when they were up at Al Kut and then in Baghdad.

We'd shoot re-supply initially to all three teams, the two-team section [teams one and two] with the Marine division and the other team [team three] that was by itself with

Tarawa. But eventually CPT Salvetti's and Mr. Barnett's teams got so far ahead, they were up in Baghdad. The other team was in Al Kut, so a lot of times we'd either meet at Jalibah or we'd send re-supplies to Al Kut and then let the third team (which was Hartman's) re-supply the first and second teams in Baghdad.

Resupply was the primary responsibility of the platoon headquarters, because the Marines started to run low on food and water, especially early in the war after the first week with that sand storm that went on for several days. So we made sure that we re-supplied our own guys. It was good for them, because then they had stuff to trade with the Marines for other things that they needed when we couldn't get up there.

Q: How was it being with the Marines?

A: The Marines were interesting. Their pilots are different, of course. They are all officers instead of having officers and warrant officers. They were a lot of fun, I think, but they have a very different concept of war. Their concept from day one was "we're going to go and kick their ass and then we're going to leave." They had no concept that they would actually be there longer than we were, which was surprising. We didn't either. We thought they would be gone long before we left.

So they were very slow at building a base camp. Ali Al Salem was a Kuwaiti airbase. The Air Force has been building there since the first Gulf War, so they have a very nice setup. They had two pools and air-conditioned buildings.

We drove in and we were thinking, "Boy, this would be an all right place. They have Häagen Daz ice cream. This isn't going to be too bad." Well, we ended up living down in the "snake pit." That's what they called the area where the Marines were living. Basically it was white Bedouin tents with no air conditioning. For showers we had to be bused to the Air Force initially. The Marines were saying, "We'll have showers up in two weeks and we'll eventually move you over to these hard-back tents with air conditioning and whatever else."

It was mid-May until we moved into those air-conditioned tents, and they had sporadic water problems up until the day we left, which was June 8th. So they never really did get the base camp built up. I think we would have been much better off on the Army side, because the Army is much better at that after the Bosnia and Kosovo experience. We can build a base camp. We go in prepared to do that. I think the Marines were wholly unprepared to do that.

But given the cards that they were dealt, they did a really good job and they did an amazing job fighting. You know, 3d ID just raced up the western side and there was no opposition whatsoever, whereas the Marines fought through eight or nine Iraqi divisions. They are very tough soldiers, and I have a lot of respect for them, that's for sure.

Q: What was their reaction to you?

A: I think they really liked having us there. They didn't know how to use us. Somebody had spread the rumor that we wouldn't go into any hot LZs, and that we wouldn't go forward at all. That is wholly not true. It is kind of situationally dependent. You don't want to go into an LZ that comes under fire, because we had nothing to fire back with; but at the same time, with sporadic gunfire we would have gone forward and gotten patients.

There were times that they used us just for patient transfers from one medical facility to a bigger medical facility. They kind of wasted the asset occasionally, but not all the time. It took a lot of education on our part to say, "Hey, we're the best asset to use. We've got medics on board, and the aircraft is set up for medical evacuation. We've got oxygen and all those other things. CASEVAC may have a corpsman on board, but they don't have everything that we've got on board to help a patient. So you are better off giving your critical patients to us."

That was a real education process. But I think in the end we did a lot of good.

Q: The Army is one culture, and now you are dealing with another. How would you describe the Marine culture?

A: The basic memory I have to describe the difference in culture is a meeting MAJ Gentry [the company commander] went to along with the XO and the maintenance platoon leader. I remember MAJ Gentry telling the story. There were all the XOs and commanders in the meeting, and they were talking about how we had one fixed facility hangar for the entire Marine Air Group, which was huge. They were asking, "How are we going to use this hangar? Are we going to put office space in the hangar, or are we going to use it to do maintenance?" Well, our maintenance platoon leader, CPT Mallory, was very big into, "Hey, I want to use this for maintenance. This is what the hangar is for. It is for maintenance. For UH-60 maintenance, we have to have the blades level off to do pressure checks so that the temperature levels off and whatever else. We need the hangar. We need the shade. Let's use it for maintenance."

Well, the rest of the squadrons apparently wanted to use it for office space. So the XO is going around the table, and he said to one of the squadrons, "So what you're telling me is you want to use it for office space. So you are going to have soldiers out working in 120 degree heat with no shade working on an aircraft." The squadron commander was like, "Yep." The XO replied, "Okay, I can respect that," and just moved on. Whereas, you know, the Army concept is, "Hey, we want to give the soldiers some shade – a little bit of sensitivity toward the soldiers." There was definitely a different culture. The Marines are much tougher.

The other thing that I remember from over there was an E4 Marine lance corporal. She had a private, an E3, and they were both commo specialists. They were running land cable for the internet or for SIPR. The E4 goes, "Come here, I'm going to give you a block of instruction on this." If an E4 in the Army told an Army E3 that, at least in today's environment, the E3 would just look at him like, "Are you crazy?"

The level of respect between ranks is much different in the Marine Corps. I actually liked it. They are much more disciplined and their soldiers are really good. It is definitely a different culture.

Q How did the deployment go?

A: It was interesting. I was sitting at home having Christmas Eve dinner and we got the phone call. I told the family. "Well, my leave has been canceled." I was going to take leave after Christmas; I was going to pull duty on Christmas day and then take leave afterwards. That way my troops would get the week off. So for everybody it was kind of a glum Christmas.

But it went pretty well. I think it was the 27th of December when we came in, and we all sat down and talked about everything. We all kind of had that dreadful feeling. We kind of knew it was coming, so we came in and talked about it and it went pretty smooth.

We had all kinds of money to spend. The floodgates kind of opened, so we got a lot of things that we needed. We got some new tentage. We got some new stoves for heating the tents before we went over. We really didn't need stoves, but we had them in case we needed them.

Q: What does the temperature go to at night?

A It got cool when we were first there. I would say down in the 40s, but your sleeping bags handle that. It is warmer during the day. It is 70s during the day even in the winter, so it wasn't bad.

We spent money on personal data assistants (PDAs), and little memory storage devices which were great. We really used those a lot.

Q What was the greatest advantage of those?

A It was a little teeny pocket-sized 256 megabyte memory storage, a little data stick we could use, instead of using disk drives that all quit over there. With all the sand and dust, the disk drives didn't work.

Q: Even the Army stuff that's been procured for extreme conditions?

A: Yeah, a lot of it just didn't work very well. There was just too much dust for a regular 3.5-inch floppy disk. Whereas these memory sticks plug into your USB port, and the computer automatically reads it, if you have Windows 2000 or greater. It gives you 256 megabytes of storage. It stores a large amount of files on one of these little, tiny pocket size things, versus one megabyte of storage on the 3.5-inch disk.

A lot of us wrote all our awards at the end of the war on that. We put operations orders on those, and whatever we needed. They were really nice.

Q: How about the other support you needed to deploy: family support, personnel, medical, dental, and so on?

A: Pretty much all went very smoothly. We did everything we needed to do. We set up a training plan, did as much training as we could here at Fort Benning, and got as many annual check rides as we could out of the way. Flight physicals; we got as much done as we could. Night vision goggle currency flights: we did those. We knocked out some more readiness level progression flights for the new pilots. We got one or two WO-1s just before we left, so we did as much as we could. We didn't have a lot of time. There was a lot to do in a very short amount of time. There was less than three weeks from notification until we left.

Q: How about movement of the aircraft?

A: That went really smooth. It was actually surprising how smooth it went. We flew from here to Savannah, which was the port, and it was amazing because all fourteen aircraft made it within a day's time frame. I was very surprised, and I think a lot of us were pleasantly surprised that it went as easily as it did. Because if you have to move everything like that, you are usually going to have some sort of maintenance problem, but we didn't. A lot of credit goes to the maintenance platoon for that.

Q: How about receiving the aircraft at the other end?

A: The other end went really smooth too. That wasn't bad. We waited forever, and that was one thing I really remember. We got to Kuwait and we were sitting at Camp Arifjan, which is southwest of Kuwait City. We sat there two or three weeks in a warehouse. Three of our aircraft came over on strategic air (C-5), which was nice, because we then had something to train with.

But it took awhile to get those up and running. The rest of the aircraft didn't come for probably three to four weeks, and it just felt like forever, sitting there. It was like, "Why are we here without our equipment?"

That was very irritating to most of us, but we weren't the only unit in that situation. I think the Army rushed to have a whole bunch of troops on the ground, but didn't do a

very good job of making sure their equipment coincided with their landing. I mean, if I had planned it, I would have it so the troops arrived two days before their equipment. It makes no sense to have troops there with no equipment, unless you are using them on a briefing slide to say that we have this many troops on the ground. I would have to say that that was very irritating.

Q What was the operating environment that you ran into: weather, climate, terrain?

A: Kuwait is pretty much a flat, big sandbox, for lack of a better way to describe it. Kuwait City is beautiful, and it is great to fly over any time because there are lots of lights and lots of buildings that provide depth perception, especially in your night vision goggles. But once you get out into the Kuwaiti desert, it is very tough flying conditions, especially under night vision goggles. They work off amplified light, but there is no light to amplify in the desert, especially if there is a zero illumination night. If there is no moon, then it's extremely hard to see. Combine that with the dustiness when you go in for a landing, because you are always going into a dusty LZ or dust landing.

It is very dangerous, and we found that out very shortly into the war. I went out on one mission into Iraq, in the Jalibah area. When we flew up there, it was me and another pilot in command, Mr. Lenander. I did the first attempt at the landing, but it was way too dusty. We browned out at about 50 feet, completely, completely brown. So I pulled up on the collective and I did a go-around. Mr. Lenander was also a pilot in command, but I just happened to be the pilot in command that night. Before the flight, we're like, "Hey who wants to be the PIC?" "I don't care. You can have it if you want it." "All right, I'll log the time."

So I asked if he wanted to try it, and he said, "Yeah, I'll try it." So we went around the second time, and we probably dusted out at 25 feet or so. It was a really dusty LZ. So I said, "Hey, you want me to try it again?" And he said, "No, I guess I'll try it one more time."

Q: It's like landing in snow.

A: Yeah, it really is. Terrible. So he tries it the third time. We kept trying because there was a little girl and her father on the ground, Iraqis, and the little girl was probably going to die if we didn't get in. At least that is what we were told. I think she had a gunshot wound to the head; she was critical. We finally got her aboard. We were trying to get her down to Kuwait to get her to a hospital.

So we went around the third time and we made it in, but it was a very rough landing, and when we get down on the bottom, we hit very, very hard and bounced a long way. It didn't feel terrible, but it was pretty bad. We got out, and the crew chief says, "Hey sir, you want to look at this?" I'm thinking, "Why did I have to choose to be PIC tonight?

The responsible one?" The first thought in my mind was that Mr. Lenander could have been, but it didn't matter at that point, it was already done.

So I get out and I take a look. We had cracked one of the panels on the doorstep; luckily there was no other damage that I could find. I went out and looked with a flashlight, and there was no other damage. We're in Iraq, so we talked to the rest of the crew. I said, "Hey, it's fine, the blades haven't fallen off or anything, we're still spinning, so let's try and take off and if it feels bad we'll come back and land."

We got the patients on board, took off and came back to Kuwait. We ended up being fine, but after that we decided to implement a policy that if it was below 25 percent illumination, unless it was an urgent patient, you weren't going to fly. It was just so dark with so little illumination, and combine that with the dust at night time, it was just an extremely dangerous flight environment.

Daytime was the same way. There was one time before the war started when we were all flying. We flew to Texaco, which was the Marine area they called Texaco. We were going to do some training with the 1st Marine Division. It was actually a beautiful day. When we took off from there, it was starting to get a little bit cloudy, but we thought it should be fine.

We took off and got caught in a huge sand storm; we landed in the Kuwaiti desert and just had to wait because it was so bad. At first we kept hovering for a while, but then it got below quarter mile visibility. It looked like you were engulfed in a huge sandbox; there was sand everywhere.

We finally landed on the desert, because it was so terrible, and we stayed in the desert until the sand storm calmed down. We had no idea that we were going to encounter that; it just came up out of nowhere. So it was definitely a dangerous flight environment.

I think we all believe that we are very lucky that we made it out as good as we did. Things could have been a lot worse: we could have lost some pilots. The Marine Air Group we were with did lose a couple of aircraft, but we didn't lose anybody and we flew 1,600 hours in a very short amount of time. So we were very lucky, I think. We were smart, but we were lucky.

Q: How about your crew? How was their level of training? For example, did you have 91Ws – how well prepared were they?

A: We had very junior crews, I would say. There were some very experienced back-seaters with the 67Ts and 91Ws – the chiefs and the medics. We've got some very experienced pilots, but we've also got some very junior guys. We either have experience or no experience, with very few in the middle. We had some very junior crews. Several of us

– myself, Mr. Rogers, and Mr. Urman – were 700 or 800 hour pilot in commands, which is pretty junior for pilot command.

We were flying with some pretty junior PIs [co-pilots]. CPT Salvetti was Mr. Roger's PI; he was probably a 500 or 600 hour guy. I had a 300-hour PI, Mr. Waters, who was my co-pilot, and that was kind of the norm.

A: It was definitely some pretty junior crews. But we also had a couple senior crews. Like the Company Commander, who flew with Mr. Wilson; that was probably a 3,000-hour crew, which was a pretty experienced crew.

There were some junior crews flying some very dangerous missions, but we did very well, I think.

Q: Did you all have experience with desert flying prior to that?

A: No.

Q: So that was learned on the job.

A: We all got basically two or three flights over there before the war started, so we didn't actually have very much time in the air before it began. It was very, very little flight time, and most of us probably had six to ten hours max in desert environment before the war started, including the local area orientations. We probably only had four to five desert landings. It was definitely a short training period, I would say. There's a lot of us who had been to Bosnia and flown in mountains, but it is a little bit different environment flying in the desert.

Q: Had you flown in Bosnia too?

A: I went to Bosnia for about six months before Iraq. We got back in March of 2002.

Q: How about your Bosnia experience, what was that like?

A: That was a really good experience. It was great. What was cool about Bosnia was we went there 33 days before the World Trade Centers fell. We went up to Holland Hook, New Jersey. That was the port that we went out of, because we were flying with the 29th Infantry Division, the command and control element of the Virginia National Guard. They were going out of Holland Hook Port. That's right near Long Island and New York City.

So we got specially briefed. We had four aircraft. We actually had five aircraft that went up there, but only four were going to Bosnia. We brought five just in case one broke hard going up to the port.

We flew around the World Trade Center and directly over Central Park, and then back into the port. Then, of course, we got to Bosnia and watched on TV in the Task Force Med Eagle TOC as the World Trade Centers fell. After that we executed – I guess that October – a raid on Visoko Airfield where they took down 23 supposed Al Qaeda terrorists.

Later on that year we also went and did two more raids in connection with Enduring Freedom. The first was on a big weapons stockpile including surface to air missiles. On the second raid, they were trying to get a Bosnia war criminal, but a French Captain called ahead and foiled the raid.

We came home in March 2002, and it was pretty uneventful. Then nine months later, of course, we were getting in the slot to go to Iraq and Kuwait.

Q: How was the morale?

A: I think everybody did really good. Everybody pulled together as a team. I don't think anybody was really excited about going. Well, there were some people who were really excited about going, but I think generally speaking, this unit has been run ragged since I've been here.

CONUS MEDEVAC is very short staffed and there is a lot of things that they want us to do. For instance, this unit, since I've been here, has covered Fort Stewart, Florida Ranger camp, Mountain Ranger Camp and Fort Benning. Our sister unit, the 57th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) at Fort Bragg, has covered Fort Knox, they have helped cover Stewart and at times they've come down and done Mountain Ranger Camp; they've been extremely busy also. That is a reoccurring theme throughout CONUS MEDEVAC. The sister unit has been to Bosnia, they went for SFOR 8, we went for SFOR 10.

Before that there's been Honduras, there was Egypt, there was South America and whatever else. There have been all kinds of different missions. This unit has continually been busy like that.

So, I think a lot of the soldiers are very tired. I shouldn't say a lot of the soldiers, I should say the flight crew members, because the flight crew members have borne the brunt of the OPTEMPO. The maintenance platoon, they work hard and they may work until six or seven sometimes, and they may make work an occasional weekend, but generally speaking they get all their weekends off.

The same with the headquarters platoon. But the flight crews, they can expect, since I've been in this unit, to be gone at least two weeks a month at a TDY location somewhere (maybe longer). At least 50 percent of the year they are gone somewhere.

Q: How are the families coping?

A: I think the families do a pretty good job. I don't think they really like it and I know my wife doesn't really like it, but I think they do a pretty good job of pulling together and supporting each other. But it is definitely a tough unit on families, a very tough unit for families.

It is also a tough unit on soldiers because it asks a lot of soldiers and it doesn't have a lot, unfortunately, that the commander or any of the leadership can give back. We just don't have enough people to say, "You can have a two-week block leave. We can fit your leave in here." "Well, I want to take leave here." "I'm sorry, you can't take that leave, because it doesn't work into the duty schedule, but you can take this week and a half. You can't take a month. You can take three weeks."

I think that wears on the soldiers. They get tired because the Army continually asks more and more and there is not a lot that we as leaders can give them to say thank you. I think people generally expect these conditions, but at the same time it gets a little old.

Q: How about command and control in Iraq? How did that work?

A: I didn't work a lot outside of the unit with that, but from what I saw, it worked pretty well. All of our administrative work went through 3d MEDCOM. They generally seemed to give us pretty good support.

I don't remember anything specifically being bad or that we needed that we didn't get. The Marines, like I said, treated us pretty well. There were some things that they could have done better, but I think they treated us as well as they treated their own people. In the end we had to kind of fight to get into the air-conditioned tents, but generally speaking, we got the same treatment that the Marines got.

I am not the best one to talk to you about that because as I said, I didn't work on that level so much. I was more in the company dealing with the crews than I was outside. CPT Clyde, CPT McMahan or MAJ Gentry could probably give a better picture there.

Q: How was the re-deployment back to Fort Benning?

A: The re-deployment was great. We were up in An Numaniyah when we got the word and heard we were on the 60-day short list. That meant we were going to get home in 60 days or less, and that was a great morale booster.

Moving the company out of An Numaniyah back to Ali Al Salem was extremely smooth. Everybody worked very hard. Everybody was like, "We're going home. We're going home." What you don't realize when you hear 60 days is it sounds like a short amount

of time, but it is a very long amount of time when you don't have a lot to do, because the mission load dramatically decreased at that point. We only had two birds on duty up in Baghdad and we cut down to two birds on duty over in Al Kut. Then those birds in Baghdad moved south of Baghdad.

Initially, we had had nine birds forward. We cut down to four birds forward and two birds on duty at Ali Al Salem. We pulled back the majority of the teams, and were just sending four aircraft at a time. So it was a much reduced mission load, and people were starting to get bored. There wasn't much to do. You can probably do everything you need to do to re-deploy seven or eight times in 60 days.

Obviously there was a lot of down time, and I think people's morale started to drop. And there was a lot of jerking back and forth type of stuff. "Hey, we think we're getting on the boat the beginning of May." "Well, maybe now it is going to be the middle of May." "Well, now it is going to be the end of May." Finally we got on the boat and left in the first week of June. So there was a lot of time there when people were kind of jerked back and forth.

For us, it ended well. We did get out at the 60 day mark or close to it. Where I really feel bad was those 3d ID soldiers who had been jerked around. For us it was bad, but we eventually went out and it was still within our time limit. But those guys really went back and forth, and I hope that's something the Army will learn. It's something I definitely learned as a future commander. I will never put it out that we're leaving until we have definite dates. I think you can't recover what it does to your soldiers' morale. I don't think the Army expected to have happen what happened, but it is non-recoverable when you tell a soldier he is going home, and then you have to go back later and say, "Well, you are going to go home eventually, but not when we told you that you were going to go home." That was definitely difficult for people.

But coming back was great. We flew into Warner Robins [Air Force Base], and then we were bused here. Probably the best memory was the plane. It was an American Airlines flight and the whole way back it was all volunteer crews that were flying troops back. We got on the plane, and they put all the officers in first class seats. "Wow, this is great." It was the first soft seat I had sat in in four months.

Q: And it was bigger, too.

A: Yes, so it was comfortable. Even if it had been a regular seat it would have been great because it was a soft chair. Hard to believe that an airline chair felt good, but it did.

So we get on the plane – it was a [Boeing] 767 – and the crew was very nice, "Yeah, we all volunteered to be here." And they are passing around flags and stuff for us to sign. The captain announced that they had an open cockpit policy, so several of us rode up front. Throughout the flight, everybody kept going up. Coming into JFK I rode in the

cockpit on the landing, and it was just a great time because the crews were really cool. Some of our soldiers said, "We want to be flight attendants for the day." So they gave a couple guys aprons and they helped serve the food. We had a lot of fun. We just did a lot of different things that you don't normally do on an airline. They were just really great to us.

We finally got back here, and everybody was really tired. It was a very long day of traveling. We got bused to here, and the welcome was surprising. They had banners up along the hangar and there were maybe 300 people waiting for us. They were all screaming and yelling, and the band was there. It was a neat experience, and it was something I definitely will always remember.

Q: Well, you deserved it.

A: We marched in and the band played and there were a couple of speeches or whatever, pretty quick. I can't remember a word that they said. Then they released the formation to go find your family, and I couldn't find my wife. It took a good fifteen minutes to find my wife. She'd changed her hair color, so I didn't recognize her and she's short so she mixed right in with the crowd. But we finally found each other.

Q: How was the re-integration with the families?

A: Everything seems to have gone pretty smooth. There have been a couple of soldiers that I think have had issues, but generally, I think it has been smooth.

Q: Any memorable characters? Any particularly unusual incidents?

A: Probably the biggest memorable event for me was when we did that hard landing in Iraq. That was like the second time I flew into Iraq.

Q: That's not a landing you forget.

A: It definitely wasn't. Another thing was kind of funny – this is kind of cool, I guess more for aviators than for anybody else – when the war initially kicked off, we were wearing the MOPP suit (the Mission Oriented Protective Posture chemical protective suit) pretty much continuously for the first three to four days. I remember we were all trying to have good spirits, but we really didn't know what was going to happen. Of course, the U.S. did that surprise aerial attack trying to get Saddam that threw the entire war plan off.

So it felt like we were just sitting ducks. Everybody was getting really angry, because we were sitting there, and Ali Al Salem seemed like it was the main missile target besides Kuwait City. They kept firing missiles at the Marine base. If you watched Fox News, you'd see Oliver North saying "They're firing missiles at us again." He was right where we were at. It really got old after a while.

I remember going to sleep that night. We were just exhausted because we didn't get any sleep. They kicked the war off the next night. Before I went to bed I went to dinner. They had lobster and everything else.

I remember eating lobster and we were just all eating as fast as we could, because we didn't know when the next horn was going to go off. Just as I got the second lobster tail out, the horn goes off again. I remember I took the lobster tail and shoved it in my mouth, the entire lobster tail, and then I put the gas mask on top of it so I could finish up my lobster tail. We didn't know how long we were going to be in this bunker, so I had this entire lobster tail in my mouth as I was trying to seal my mask. We were all running out getting into the bunker. It was hilarious.

Q: You'd make a great scuba diver.

A: That was pretty funny. I was actually on duty for the first few days of the war, and it was just so ridiculously hot wearing a flight suit plus the MOPP suit and everything else. It was just hard to fly.

On the second day the commander said to me, "What are you wearing all that crap for?" I said, "Because we're supposed to wear flight suits." He says, "I'm not wearing a flight suit anymore." So, I took the flight suit off and I remember that for the next three days all I wore was a MOPP suit and underwear, because it was much cooler. So, the rules kinda got bent a little bit. It was funny to see how that happened. You know, I think that was probably the best part about seeing a war in the Army. It was the first time I've seen the Army just do its job. All the other crap didn't matter. You know, a lot of the rules didn't matter, as long as you did things safely and got the job done. It was nice to see all the other BS go away.

Q: What were other lessons learned that you thought were important?

A: Satellite phones were critical. SIPRNET, the secure internet, was also critical, and being able to use those technologies. We are actually trying to order satellite phones now so we can have them permanently in the unit. We used those to maintain contact with our forward teams. Pretty much the only contact was the satellite phones or SIPR, which is secure internet classified up to secret.

Q: You could also use that for e-mail?

A: Yeah, it had e-mail. A lot of the war was fought on it. There were chat rooms: there was a logistics chat room, a medical chat room, a maneuver chat room, etc. We watched the second time they thought they got Saddam in that Baghdad restaurant. Mr. Ivy, our TACOPS officer, watched the maneuver chat room as these intel guys come on, "redirect all air assets to this grid. This is the big one," or something to that effect. Then, 30

minutes later on the news, "The U.S. Air Force attacked this restaurant they think Saddam was in." It was a residence or a restaurant. I thought it was a restaurant. It was one or the other, towards the end of the war.

Q: Apparently, he just got out of there in the nick of time.

A: Yeah. Which is pretty impressive.

Q: This is a change, isn't it?

A: It is. It's definitely a change. But it was more reliable than radio communications; much more reliable. I think those were big lessons learned.

The other big lesson learned was we had no idea that the crews that were forward were going to jump as many times as they jumped, or move as many times as they moved. I remember telling the commander, "Because I am into backpacking on my own, I want to get two-man North Face or Eureka tents, which are both really good backpacking brands. I'd like to get them for our forward support teams to make them more mobile." I had seen them at Fort Polk when we went to JRTC, and the aviation task force at Fort Drum had them. They are really nice, small tents.

You've got tons of room in the aircraft, until you think about how all that room is dedicated to patient care. It is not dedicated to your personal equipment. When you are jumping forward, you don't want to have your aircraft just completely filled to the hilt with stuff so you can't move around and use your cabin space for treating patients.

The commander balked. He said, "No, it's too much money. I don't want to do it." But, when we got over there he wrote an email and said, "I'm still trying to pull my foot out of my mouth. I had no idea that we would jump that much."

That was a big lesson learned: it's good to have two sets of equipment for the forward teams. Have your peacekeeping set with framed tents – heavy tentage – that you can stand up and move around in with a much nicer living space. Then have your maneuver tents that take you five minutes to set up when you are supporting a maneuver unit on the move: a heavy kit and a light kit. So that was probably the biggest lesson learned.

Q: To sum up, what would you be most proud of?

A: Probably three things. I'd say number one, that everybody came back; all of our equipment came back, and we are all safe and sound. Everybody got to reunite with their families. I think we all thought that we'd lose somebody. Of course, with aviators, it is always going to be the other guy. It is not going to be you. But everybody, I think, deep down was worried about that. I know I was. And I didn't want to lose any of my troops.

In a unit like this, you are gone two weeks a month – especially the fellow crewmembers. I know these guys. I've lived with these guys. In some cases I've spent more time with these guys than I have with my wife over the last three years. You know, it would be very hard for any of us to lose one of our buddies.

The other thing is just the amount of flying that we did. We flew over 1,600 hours, over 600 patients. The most active period was the 30 days from when the war started. During those 30 days we flew 1,200 hours and 550 patients, something like that. So it was just an incredible feat, and we did it while non-doctrinally supporting a Marine expeditionary force, which had never been done before in combat. We are the first Army medical evacuation unit that has ever been assigned to do that.

We were assigned to do something that normally would have taken three MEDEVAC companies. Each Army division gets its own MEDEVAC company, plus the Corps rear will get its own MEDEVAC company to do all the general support missions. So we did with our fourteen aircraft what normally 45 would do, and that, to me, is definitely a large accomplishment. We all pulled together, we all worked hard to do that. It is just an amazing feat that we did as well as we did.

Q: Anything else that you think is important to talk about?

A: Not really. I think I've pretty much covered it.

Q: Well, congratulations. On behalf of the Surgeon General's Office, thanks for what you did, and thanks for your service. It has been good talking to you.

A: Thanks.

AMEDD ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM
INTERVIEW OIF 062

INTERVIEW WITH
CPT ADRIAN SALVETTI
498TH MEDICAL COMPANY (AIR AMBULANCE)

CONDUCTED BY
COL RICHARD VAN NESS GINN, USA, RET.
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA
19 AUGUST 2003

OFFICE OF MEDICAL HISTORY
OFFICE OF THE SURGEON GENERAL, U.S. ARMY/
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. ARMY MEDICAL COMMAND
FALLS CHURCH, VIRGINIA

Q: This interview is with Captain Adrian Salvetti. What's your background, Captain Salvetti? Where are you from, and where did you go to school?

A: I grew up in Upstate New York: Saratoga Springs. I attended Embry Riddle in Daytona Beach, Florida for five years. My degree is in aerospace engineering. I have always been interested in aviation, so I tried to get involved with Army Aviation upon my commissioning. I was accepted into the Medical Service Corps, and was selected for the flight program.

After graduating in 1999, I went to OBC that summer, and when I found out I had been accepted to flight school. I was very excited about that. From OBC, I went to flight school for a year and then to Korea for a year, with the 542d Medical Company (Air Ambulance) up at Camp Page. I then came to Fort Benning and was here for almost exactly one year before we deployed.

Q: How did the deployment go?

A: Good. I mean it is the only deployment I had ever been on so I have nothing to compare it to. I missed my family, that's the biggest thing. I have a wife, and a dog.

Q: Is she from New York?

A: She's from Delaware; we attended the same college and met there. I think everyone misses their family during the deployment. For most of the people I know, the hardest part was being away from family and friends.

During the deployment itself: it seems like there is a lot less to worry about once you're deployed. I have discussed this with my buddies. When we went over there, all the paper work and the meetings went down to a minimum. There is a lot of sitting around time, but in general, the actual job seems to be simplified to a great extent.

Q: How was it for her?

A: She did pretty good. She is pretty social, so she got involved with the FRG, the Family Readiness Group, which is I guess what replaces the wives club from back in the day. She made friends with many of her peers in the group and they supported each other. It makes me feel much better when I know she is happy at home.

Q: How was the support prior to leaving, in terms of the medical, legal and all the odds and ends you had to attend to?

A: It was pretty good. Some stuff was above my area of concern, like how our Company training was specifically organized and planned. I know it happens – usually I was in on the Company's broad scope planning, all those long term plans, but the pre-deployment

training sort of just happened from my viewpoint. I was busy organizing my team, our equipment, and making sure everyone was squared away, ready to go.

Pre-deployment went pretty smooth, but there is always learning. I was working as the administration officer back here in garrison, prior to deployment. I was busy with the SRP, which is the Soldier Readiness Program. Everyone knows it occurs before deployment, but when it comes time to do it, you have to relearn the regulations and figure out exactly what you are supposed to do.

Q: What was your job?

A: Team leader. By doctrine, each team consists of three crews, three aircraft, and a small amount of equipment. By doctrine, a lieutenant is in charge of one team, and that's pretty much what I was concerned with. When we got over there, that all kind of changed.

I was also in the Company advanced party, which coincidentally, did not arrive in advance of the rest of the Company. The advanced party consisted of my team, plus a small operations section, and Captain Clyde, who was going to come over as part of the OPs section and also leader of the advanced party. Our three aircraft, humvee, and other equipment was loaded onto a C-5. We thought we were leaving about two weeks before everyone else to get over there and get settled, but it did not work out as planned.

We knew from our orders that we would be supporting the Marines. We had some points of contact with the 3d MEDCOM over there, who would be the Army chain of command we would report to on a limited basis, but we didn't really know what to expect as to where we were going or anything like that. So, we sent this advance party to try and get it all squared away.

But the way it turned out was: we left on a C-5, and then, literally the day after, higher headquarters told the rest of the Company they were leaving. They left about two days after we did, and actually got there before us due to our C-5 breaking down and making several stops. So the whole advance party concept went out the window. But it did help a little bit because our advance party had some equipment available for our use prior to the arrival of the majority of our Company's equipment. We had the three aircraft, and maintenance got those up and running, then we were able to train a little bit earlier than if we had waited for the rest of equipment to arrive by boat.

Q: Now you're in Kuwait, and you find out you are supporting the Marines. How did that go?

A: Well, when we first got there we were living at Arifjan, which is in the southern portion of Kuwait near the coast. It is a big logistical support area. By the end of the war, it had

grown into a very large area that had all the supporting agencies there. We stayed on cots in a very long, big empty warehouse for about two weeks, waiting to move to where some of the Marines Corps aviation assets were located, Ali Al Salem Air Base, which is a Kuwaiti airbase shared with the U.S. Air Force. We stayed at Arifjan for about two weeks, and while we were there, we tried to get some preparations done. It was difficult because we didn't have any resources whatsoever, except for the little equipment support package that we brought for the advance party. We didn't have computers. We didn't have any kind of communications resources. So we had to borrow from our Army higher headquarters, which was probably the most exposure we had to them for the entire war, because we were right there with them at Arifjan – the 3d MEDCOM [USAR] out of Atlanta. So during this down time, we tried to do some coordination and get information about how we were going to do business over there, but still, there was a lot of sitting around.

After two weeks, we sent the company to Ali Al Salem in pieces. First it was the air crews, so we could do some more training. Then slowly but surely the entire company moved. The Marines were in the process of putting up tents and building their little living area there when we first arrived.

The housing situation at Ali Al Salem, at least the Marine Corps part of Salem, was essentially large white tents that are made in Pakistan and have wood floors. We stayed in those. It wasn't that hot yet, so it was pretty comfortable.

The Marines were building up their chow halls, but they didn't have any bathrooms, laundry or showering facilities, so it was pretty bare bones. There was some kind of an agreement between the Air Force and the Marines that allowed us to go to the Air Force side of Ali Al Salem and use their stuff during the period of time the Marines were still building up their living and support area (LSA).

That period, from when we moved to Ali Al Salem to when hostilities were starting out, was filled with training, aviation training, getting familiar with the desert, establishing contact with the Marine Corps folks and trying to figure out how they were going to integrate our FSMTs, which are the forward teams, and how those teams were going to work inside the Marine structure. That concept for our support was new, because the Marine theory is you are on a boat, you get on the beach, and then you overwhelm them. I don't really know that much about it, but I don't think they were really built to go dragging on and on for 300 miles like they did. We found Marine doctrine was very different from the current Army doctrine. Our FSMTs had to be placed somewhere in the Marine battlefield plan. We had difficulty finding the right place, because the Marine Corps doctrinally uses its helicopters very differently than the Army, and they don't have their own dedicated MEDEVAC aircraft like the Army does.

But, it worked out all right. Their brigade design is different. The Army seems to have more echelons of support. It seems with the Marines that it is more like everyone is up

front and then you have a single, very large supporting agency somewhere behind them. Everyone up front are fighters, with very little internal service support. There was no aviation support staged up close to the battle, at the brigade level. So it is a little bit different than Army doctrine based-operations.

So the way that our FSMTs were going to support them had to be figured out. Honestly, by the time the fighting kicked off, we sort of had it figured out, but not really. We knew that we (my FSMT) were going to be with the division headquarters. During the advance, the Marines operated two different division headquarters. There was a "forward", which was a smaller element, and then there was the "main" division headquarters. Each HQ jumps over the other as they advance. One is moving while the other operates.

The Headquarters staff told us they could support three aircraft, but we have 14 aircraft in our company, with nine aircraft designated to go forward, using the traditional Army doctrine. At the beginning of the war, one of our teams was going to go support the British – that was three aircraft. Then I had my team's six aircraft that needed to be forward. The Marine Division Headquarters said they could only take three in their area at the division headquarters when we started moving. The other three would have to be stationed at a FARP (Forward Area Refuel and Rearming Point).

To have split operations like that would have been really complicated. Right away we were trying to get around that, but that was the plan initially.

What else were we doing before the war? There was a good deal of aircraft maintenance occurring. We had to prepare the aircraft. We put blade tape on the rotor blades. Our maintenance personnel were worried about us flying too much during our train-up because of the wear and tear on the aircraft. It was kind of a trade off. You want to train to get used to the desert conditions – the brown outs, the NVG's and all that – but at the same time you don't want to beat down the aircraft too much.

The NVG flying was kind of curious in the desert. You have two options over there under NVGs, is pretty much the conclusion I came to. You can either fly low and slow, or high and as fast as you can go. If you are flying low, you have some contrast and you can see the features in the sand at about 50 feet. But your reaction time for everything is reduced. You are very close to the ground, and you can't see that far out in front of you under low illumination. When flying at 50 feet, you can't go that fast because you want to give yourself a little bit of time to react if you start to descend, or if you see wires or something like that. Or you can fly at about 250 feet, pretty much above all the obstacles, but you don't have any way of telling how high you are, other than your radar altimeter, which tells you how high you are off the ground in feet.

So that was a new experience, because flying over sand is something that we don't regularly do. Anyway, that's pretty much what we did leading up to the start of the war.

Q: Were you practicing with the Marines on loading patients?

A: We did some practicing. Some flight crews went to maybe eight different Marine sites in Kuwait, trying to teach them that, first of all, "This is a Black Hawk," because Marines don't have Black Hawks. We experimented with some different ways of loading. We had heard from Afghanistan that they had been taking out the carousel, which is the thing in the back of the Black Hawk that can carry four or six patients, and it rotates for loading. In Afghanistan, MEDEVAC crews were saying, "You've got to take that out, it is too cumbersome." But it turned out that technique was not going to work for us**.** So after some experimentation, we put the carousel back in, and showed the Marines how to load patients with the carousel.

Also, we attended a couple of meetings with the Marine folks to talk about how they were going to use the FSMTs. We talked to the Marine Corps major in charge of the DASC (Division Air Support Center), which is attached to the division headquarters. In practice, when fully operational, it was basically a small tent attached to the Division Headquarters, that had a bunch of radios and maps, filled with personnel who were trying to control the direct air support for their Marines.

So we talked to one of the majors who was in charge of the DASC, and tried to figure out our concept of support to the Marine Corps units. That is pretty much the only stuff we did, other than internal training during that time.

Q: Which Marine unit did you support?

A: My team of six aircraft, which was actually CW3 Barnett's team and my team joined together, supported the 1st Marine Division Headquarters and everything that fell under them, which was everything the Marines had minus Task Force Tarawa and the British guys. They (the British and Tarawa) were supported by Captain John Hartman's team of three aircraft.

Q: How big was Tarawa?

A: About brigade size, I suppose. But again, the Marines had a different structure. Tarawa had its own little headquarters, like a miniature division headquarters, and they also had their own aviation assets. So I think it was kind of like an oversized brigade, is my guess. Like I said, John Hartman's team also supported the British at the beginning of the war when they were first assaulting, and then into Basrah. He said that he really enjoyed the time with the British.

Q: How were the Marines to work with?

A: They're good. I mean they have their pluses and minuses. Let's see where to start on this one. Well, firstly, they don't have MEDEVAC, so our whole theme throughout the beginning of the war was learning how to use the Army MEDEVAC. They were very receptive to our suggestions.

We primarily interfaced with the Navy personnel who were part of the PET (Patient Evacuation Team). There were two personnel in the division main and two in the division forward, and they were our interface to the DASC. We discussed our MEDEVAC missions with the PET sometimes and with the Marine Corps air guys a lot of other times, because there were different situations which required their input.

The positive part of working with the PET was they generally understood the medical aspects of the mission, although we still had to educate them regarding MEDEVAC specific considerations, specifically patient precedence and efficient use of resources. They didn't understand the aviation aspect, but they were still very receptive to us and our requirements. We had to introduce topics like crew endurance, and, basically, managing MEDEVAC. I would say, "Look, we are going to give you 24 hour MEDEVAC coverage, but you sort of have to forget that we have six aircraft out there. Just think of it as two and then if you need it, another two." Because if you have 24 hours in the day, you sort of divide it up – with six aircraft you've got two aircraft on for each eight hour shift. That's the simplistic view of it. Of course, those crews can go for 14 hours in a day, if you need to, and we did do this sometimes. I mean we had all six aircraft flying at once, at one point. If they really want us to do it, we'll do it.

But that was a totally new thing for them, managing when and for whom you should launch a mission. If you receive a routine mission, do you really want to send that crew who is out there sleeping right now? Because they probably won't be able to fly for you later. If they said yes, we'd do it, so I just had to explain that concept to them. I also explained evacuating KIAs. That was a new thing for them, because all utility type Marine Corps helicopters are general purpose. Whatever they need them to do, that's what they do. But in the Army, MEDEVAC is MEDEVAC, and if you send a MEDEVAC aircraft with a KIA back to the rear area, what that means is that you've taken one of your MEDEVAC aircraft out of play for however long they have to do that mission. Thus, during that time they cannot evacuate a live soldier who needs life saving care. That point also took a while to get across, but it's just basic doctrine for Army MEDEVAC.

Q: Were there any attempts – other than for KIAs – to use the MEDEVAC for general missions?

A: Yeah. They asked us if we could move a SEAL team, or something like that. I was sort of open to it, but once we got into the details, it turned out it was kind of an iffy situation. Usually, they had just forgotten that we were MEDEVAC, or were simply unaware of our real mission. You go, "Okay, I'll do that but you are not going to have

MEDEVAC if someone gets hurt." And then they'd respond, "Oh, that's right, I forget that you guys are MEDEVAC and that's what you do."

Q. The red cross is painted on?

A. Yeah, Here's another example of this sort of misunderstanding. We were flying down the main road that the Marines were using to advance north; we flew down it all the time. There was a little armored personnel carrier and about eight guys down on the ground, and they were all taking cover. We flew over their position, and I asked the other pilot, CW2 Rodgers, "What are they doing?" because they were waving at us. They were giving us the hand and arm signal for "there's the enemy." They were pointing their weapons in a firing motion towards one side of the road. But they were also just waving, too.

I thought, "Okay maybe someone's hurt," because this has happened before. We have gotten lots of calls on guard frequency saying "Hey, MEDEVAC helicopter, come down we've got someone hurt." We did a quick turnaround, and we made an approach to land. Then CW2 Rodgers said, "They don't have anyone hurt. They are just telling us to go shoot those guys that are over the hill about a quarter mile away." Apparently they were taking fire or they thought they were taking fire and they saw a helicopter and they thought our helicopter could go shoot at the position. The pilot said, "I don't think they have anyone hurt." So we just took off out of there. It was just an example of how I don't think the Marines got the full story on what MEDEVAC was. I mean, we don't have any guns, that's what the big red cross is indicating. But that was just kind of funny.

Q: You were relating an interesting story about Oliver North.

A: There was a sand storm about a week and a half into the war that I'm sure was shown on the news. Aircraft couldn't fly that day and most of the day after that. We were down for a day, and it was very windy conditions. The next morning we thought it was clearing up. We did about one or two missions and then tried to move north because we were at the Division Forward headquarters. The Division Main had gone in front of the Division Forward, and we were supposed to catch up with them. That's where we received all of our missions, so we needed to go there to get the info.

But as we went forward along the road, the weather turned bad, so we stopped at a FARP and stayed there for another day. Some other Marine helicopters were there at the FARP stranded with us. At some point I was walking around talking to my guys. Mr. Barnett and I, who was the other team leader there with me, were just talking when Oliver North, who was a Fox News correspondent at the time, comes up to us. So we said something like, "How are you doing, sir?" And he says, "Good."

He relates this story to us. He's moved north with the troops as an imbedded reporter, and he says "I'm here with the (Marine) company commander, and we've got a KIA on board his helicopter who needs to be evacuated. We've had him for 48 hours now. My company commander's got to go forward; he's got to get his downed aviators. They've been up there for a while and he needs to go up there and get them, but we wouldn't want to leave this KIA on the side of the road."

I didn't really know what to say to that. First of all, no one is flying so I don't think this company commander is going anywhere. We're (my team) not going anywhere. We can't take a KIA even if we were supposed to. So, I just sort of listened to him, and it didn't really go anywhere. He walked back to his helicopter, and I thought that would be the end of that.

The next day, the weather clears up and my whole team is ready to move north to division headquarters. The three aircraft that are on duty for the day took off first so we could take any missions. The other three aircraft, which were basically the night crews, took off second. They had all our team equipment in the back of their helicopters.

The first three crews got there and were immediately assigned a ton of missions because there was a bunch of folks that were hurt during the two days of the sand storm. So we took off and started flying all those missions.

The next three aircraft flew up the road to the division headquarters. Along the way they get a call from a FARP requesting evacuation of a KIA, and they called back and said, "Right now we can't get that KIA because we have equipment in our helicopter. We'll be back to get him." Their reason was twofold. They didn't pick up the KIA because they had equipment in their helicopter, but also because they may have higher priority missions waiting on them at the division headquarters. I mean, we can respond to a request from the ground for MEDEVAC, we can and have done that. But everyone knows our guys are really supposed to get their missions from the division headquarters. Only the division headquarters has the battlefield picture to know where the critically hurt are located and who they should be evacuating.

So, they went to the division headquarters and dropped all the equipment out of the back of the helicopter, turned around, came back to the FARP, got the KIA, and moved him to where he was supposed to be. Then they came back and flew their butts off for the rest of the day, because that was the heaviest mission day we had. I flew 11 hours, one of my other crews flew 13 hours, and all those guys who were supposed to be on duty at night flew a lot of hours, too – not only during the day, but all through the night. They were flying a lot; we flew all kinds of hours that day.

So we thought that was the end of that confusion, but as it turns out, the colonel running that FARP called back to the Marine division commander, or some kind of high ranking

person, and complained that Army MEDEVAC wasn't evacuating KIAs. This led to a bunch of rumors about how Army MEDEVAC is this and that.

It was pretty disheartening to hear these rumors through some of my team members who had briefly been back to the rear for maintenance. We were working very hard for the Marines and wanted to do our job the best way we know how. The Marine Corps ignorance of the MEDEVAC mission was leading them to make some incorrect assumptions and accusations.

I was pretty frustrated especially when I heard rumors about Oliver North – this is just laughable – Oliver North slapping an Army Captain. One of the pilots in my team that had briefly returned to the rear said, "Sir, did you hear this? Oliver North slapped an Army captain." I'm the only Army captain up there except for John, who is over with Tarawa, and I thought to myself, "Oliver North isn't over at Tarawa, he's over here (in my area) and I haven't received any slaps from Oliver North lately." So that was a bunch of baloney.

I remember calling back to my company commander and asking him, "What is going on back there, sir?" He was pretty good with reassuring me that that's just rumors, and there is really nothing you can do about it. That made me feel better, but it was just disheartening. It was not just me, but the morale of the team was hurt when they heard that bad- mouthing of our MEDEVAC.

Because we were sort of the stepchild of the Marines at that point, they didn't understand us, and so of course we received some of that negative stuff. But I'll tell you, in the end it all worked out very good, because once we rolled up all our stats, about how many hours we flew, first of all, how many Marine Corps patients we EVAC'd, how many Iraqis we EVAC'd that were hurt, and they realized that Army MEDEVAC doesn't have any weapons, we flew single ship and we do it for 30 days or more straight, which is totally different than what the Marines did.

Let me explain how Marine Corps Aviation usually operates, just to put this all in perspective. The Marines had helicopter companies about the same size as ours. We have 14 aircraft with nine forward at any time, and whatever else we have in the rear are also pulling missions. So, our company is going full speed ahead with every single aircraft we've got all the time. The Marines operate a little bit different. Some are out on the boat. Some are in the rear area in Kuwait, and they rotate forward, but it is only a small portion of their company at any given time. Then after several days forward, the Marine aircrews would fly back to the rear. But my team was up there more than 30 days straight without replacement, except for a few guys who went back for a day or so to do maintenance. Plus, we flew single ship, which means if we got shot down we didn't have a wing man there to call in help or offer assistance if our radios didn't work or if our guys were hurt when the aircraft plowed into the ground. We are out there by ourselves. And we didn't have any weapons. We have our 9-millimeter pistols, and that's it.

I think that once people started to understand MEDEVAC and, hear about what we did out there, it just made us feel better. Then there was not so much animosity and resentment. So it worked out all right.

Q: That was a strange incident, wasn't it?

A: You know, it's just a misunderstanding. The MEDEVAC thing was all new to them so they didn't understand that we are there for a specific reason: to get people that are hurt to where they can get help.

Q: How about the disciplinary status, morale, and level of training within the platoon?

A: Let's see, again I had oversight of two FSMTs. I took responsibility for the welfare of everyone in that group.

The guys were real good. It took a while for them to get used to the way things operated. We jumped fifteen times in thirty days, which is a lot. We don't even train like that at our little JRTCs and NTCs. Everything was fast, everything was "lack of information", and we slept in the helicopters. Here's an example. We'd get up, go into the DASC for current enemy information, but the enemy information just wasn't there like you think it would be. The intelligence personnel would say, "Well, they (the enemy) are up there in the north and here's our troops, and watch out because the entire rear area is covered with guys that could have rocket launchers and small arms fire, so there's really nowhere that's safe." That's the kind of atmosphere that we were in. As technologically advanced as our armed forces are supposed to be, enemy ground-to-air threat intelligence was non-existent at the level we worked at. During the advance, the Iraqi Army was falling apart to such an extent that the forces that could potentially attack our aircraft were basically non-conventional – almost guerilla warfare forces. The intelligence community was terrible at collecting useful information about this type of enemy's whereabouts and capabilities.

We were very lucky no one on our team was shot at, that we know of. It was a very uncertain, untested atmosphere. We were working with folks that really didn't understand MEDEVAC, and therefore they didn't really take responsibility for us at times.

For example, there was one jump we did in the middle of the night, because the DASC didn't give us enough warning to jump during the day (when jumping is much easier). We are jumping in the middle of the night with all six aircraft flying, and we go to this new location and the new DASC tells us, "You can't land here. You have to land at the FARP." Of course, the old DASC didn't tell the new DASC that we were coming. Then after telling us to move to the FARP, the new DASC fails to inform the FARP Commander that they we would be coming and would need a place for 6 Black Hawks.

So we all landed and I walked a mile to the lieutenant colonel's position who is in charge of the FARP. He's barks at me, "Who are you? What are you doing? Get out of here." Well, then I have to be all nice and diplomatic, and try to work things out, because I am the one asking for something.

We finally got our parking spots at I don't know what time that night. Everyone was kind of tired and some go to bed, or others stand ready to respond to missions. But we were about three miles away from the DASC and everything we needed. We found a temporary solution so it ended up working out that night at the FARP. The FARP had some commo with the division headquarters and would send a runner to us, down the entire length of a runway, if a mission request came through. Luckily we didn't get any mission requests that night; I think it would be have been really confusing.

That is just another example of how the plan for our FSMT's employment was very untested, and the plan for who was going to take responsibility for us was just not there. But as time went on, a kind of understanding developed that these MEDEVAC guys were always going to be there, standing by waiting, to receive missions. And there would always be six aircraft constantly harassing the division headquarters for a place to land.

But, my team, they were good. They understood after a couple of jumps that we were going to be jumping all the time. They understood that I was going to ask them every time we jumped, "See that pile of equipment over there that we're not using, that we brought to Iraq that we thought we were going to use? I'll help you, but you've got to put that in the helicopter every single time we jump, and then cart it over to our new location and dump it out."

That was just manual labor, no big deal, but it was something I asked them to do every single time. Of course, the night crews had a bad deal, because they were asked to fly at night for as long as they could, if the missions kept coming in. I tried to jump in daytime, because it is far easier to jump in daytime, but I had to ask the night crews to get up and fly with the rest of the aircraft in our team, because I wanted all the aircraft to be together for safety and command and control reasons. They did it pretty much without complaining.

Some of the force protection measures were difficult for me as a leader to enforce. We had our helicopters parked at the Marine Corps division headquarters. It felt relatively safe, because it was a ways back from the front lines. However, no one was safe from attacks made by insurgents left behind, lurking in the rear area and also from some random biological or chemical warfare attack, but we were lucky.

We weren't the only ones that were kind of lax on those force protection measures. MOPP-4 got old real quick. As an aviation unit, MOPP-4 just doesn't work if you are planning on reacting quickly to anything. It gets you tired. The first week of the war,

we were in our MOPP-4 gear, but not the mask and gloves and all that. We wore the overgarments. As time went on, even the Marines – the ground guys, would have their pants on, and the top would just be sitting on their chairs or something, so they had it available. I had a lot of trouble yelling at my guys, "get that on." I did for a while and then I just thought, "This is ridiculous."

As for Kevlars and weapons – they wore their weapons all the time, and they had their masks readily available all the time. But anytime you are not flying, it is pretty much crew rest time, and if they were just sitting there by their helicopter, I didn't say, "You need to have on your kevlar and your whole getup". It was just sort of hard for me to differentiate, are you sleeping or are you resting, because we were on call 24 hours a day.

I just wanted them to be safe. I was worried about a random Iraqi infiltrating into our parking area with a bomb, but at the same time there was only so much I could ask of my guys without expecting them to start being able to perform less. They weren't going to be able to perform the way they were needed if I required them to dig a foxhole each time we stopped.

Like I said, it wasn't just us. In that rear area there was sort of a sense of safety, and some of that stuff got a little lax. Things were moving so fast, all actions were streamlined and trimmed down to what was absolutely necessary. But my guys were good. If I asked them to put their masks on, they'd do it.

Q: Are most of the warrant officers flying Dustoff flying repetitive Dustoff tours, or do they fly general support aviation as well?

A: Some are. Some of those guys like the MEDEVAC mission and they keep coming back. Some just get stationed here randomly, and some come back to this unit because they like Fort Benning. I had two guys on my team, CW2 Bryant and CW3 Shaffer, who had been in the 498th before. They were both at the 498th, went to Korea, and then back to the 498th. Plenty of the warrant officers will go on to fly in units with different missions such as VIP, air assault and general lift support.

Q: Were they (Bryant and Shaffer) flying Dustoff in Korea?

A: No, I don't think either of them did. So they have a lot of MEDEVAC experience with this company.

Here's something I always tell warrant officers. Essentially they've got to be able to do what I do as the team leader. They were good at that. Each crew goes out on their own, and if I'm asleep or something, I said, "Hey wake me up if an issue comes up, go ahead and wake me up." But there are so many things that came up that required them to make a decision about what was best for the team, sometimes when I am not around. If it is in

the middle of the night and the PET says "Hey, Mr. Shaffer, I need you to go fly this mission," he has to consider more than just his pilot decisions and think about more than just his crew and aircraft. He has to make decisions about: "Well, if I fly now, how does this affect the team? Am I exhausting my available crew rest time? What if I go do this mission they just asked me to do, and it turns into a six hour mission?"

They did that one time. They said, "Hey, I want you to evacuate these non-priority patients way down to Kuwait so they can get on the boat." That's the kind of stuff they'd do, and it is up to our pilots to say, "Now wait a minute. You sure you want us to do that? Because what you are doing is you are taking this MEDEVAC aircraft out of its little coverage area here. We are supposed to be providing direct support to the soldiers on the front lines and you are sending us on kind of ridiculous mission. Are there other options?"

There are plenty more examples out there. What I said to the pilots on my team was, "I'm here, of course, but when you are out there flying around, you are going to have to pretty much act and think as I do. They did a really good job of that in many ways."

A lot of times our team was split up. That's another thing. On our first jump into Iraq, in fact, from Kuwait into Iraq, Mr. Shaffer advanced north in the middle of the night (I think it was him and maybe one other aircraft, or it might have just been him). He was the first one to get to the division headquarters forward area, and then the rest of the team jumped up in the morning and caught up with him. So those guys were asked to do a lot on their own.

Q: How about the proficiency of the crew chiefs and the medics?

A: Those guys performed real well. Of course, we got into a different groove over there with the unique mission we were assigned. When we originally thought about how we wanted to do things over there, they were talking about taking the carousel out of the aircraft, because it was considered too clunky and wouldn't work well in real world conditions. But we ended up taking large loads of patients quite often, and that carousel really helped with in those situations.

The backseaters got very good at loading quickly, keeping everything in order back there in the cabin and resolving different situations. We'd get these calls to pick up routine patients, and we'd be flying the mission and receive a higher priority mission. "Can you land and get this guy, he's a priority?" So the guys are in the back rearranging everything, making it work and keeping control of everything back there.

Then, we'd have iffy situations. It can be tricky mixing different types of patients. For example if you sit an injured American soldier right next to an injured Iraqi who happened to have shot the American's friend, you are going to have problems. My medic would ask, "Sir, what are we supposed to do with this Iraqi POW?" I'd just say,

"Look, if you feel comfortable with it, then we can take it. If you are not comfortable with it, then we've got to figure out a different solution."

I think some things weren't considered before the war, like the KIAs. There really wasn't a plan to evacuate KIAs, so that plan was finally developed after the 30 day point, near the end of the major part of hostilities. Until the Marine Corps took the time to consider and implement the KIA plan, our medics had to deal with the KIAs quiet a bit. We are not supposed to carry live patients and KIAs at the same time, but if we've got a KIA on board we would take them back if requested. But we tried to keep the KIAs on the other side of the carousel, so the patients wouldn't see them. If the patient was hurt badly, they would not even know that there was another guy on board probably. But we didn't have a guy that's got a small laceration sitting next to a KIA.

The medics got a lot of good experience. Flying with my medic, I saw some of what he saw. He saw a lot of injuries and stuff over there that he wouldn't have seen in ten years of normal garrison MEDEVAC. They showed a lot of leadership when we were sitting on the ground, because he's got to deal with the Marines and Soldiers on the ground. That guy on the ground may not know anything about MEDEVAC, and may be making the situation a little bit dangerous with the way he is acting around the helicopter.

The crew chiefs helped a lot. My crew chief performed assisted breathing for an hour and a half flight on one guy, because my medic had two critical patients to care for. A single medic can really only handle one guy at a time if you have to do assisted breathing, so my medic, SGT Cobb, had Corporal Moake performing assisted breathing on one guy, while he worked on the other guy. They'd habitually help each other out.

Q: Could you talk about the 91W specialty and if you could gauge how it was going?

A: I don't have any way of contrasting, because I haven't really seen the 91 Bravo in action. I've only been flying since 2000, for three and a half years. We had a lot of equipment that we didn't use, but I think our medics' training gave them enough diversity of knowledge to perform the medical actions required to keep their patients alive.

In one case, the PET wanted to give us a patient on a ventilator. SGT Cobb responded, "We've got to have another person here to run the ventilator. I can't do that." Our Company had all this equipment for greater patient sustainment that our medics didn't end up using too much. We had monitors, and honestly, I don't even know the medical jargon for it all, but we didn't have room for a lot of that stuff and we didn't have any way to support it when we went forward. So it was pretty much basic medicine back there in the cabin. At the same time, the medic did what was necessary in order to keep those guys alive. He had to deal with the Iraqis too, so there was a lot of interesting stuff with the language barrier, and whatever else.

Q: Were you able to get any impressions of the Iraqi population?

A: A little bit, but not very much. Like I said, we were in the rear area a lot and whenever possible isolated from the populace, but we were in the middle of downtown Baghdad for two or three jumps. We did take one memorable mission with an Iraqi civilian when we were in downtown Baghdad. A fuel truck turned over, and a son and his father were pulled from the wreckage. The son was hurt, but the father wasn't. We flew the son – who was a very big guy, like six five, maybe 250 pounds – we flew him and his dad to the shock trauma platoon that the Marines had set up nearby. That was nice, because you definitely felt that those Iraqis were thankful for that.

I didn't see a lot of hostile Iraqis. I saw what I guessed were friendly Iraqis as we flew around. It just felt good to sort of, in some way, say, "Hey, look, we are trying to help you here." And the civilian I just mentioned was grateful. From flying over this one suburb of Baghdad, they seemed like they lived normal lives. I mean, they were out there washing their cars, and playing soccer on Fridays, and just pretty much trying to live a normal life in the city.

Outside of Baghdad there is a very different farmer lifestyle, and the desert folks, too, were just very different. But the city people, they looked like many other western cultures.

Q: Can you think of some lessons learned?

A: Well, let's see. One is the equipment we brought. It was not appropriate for that kind of light, quick fighting. We have a request in now for two-man tents. That's what the Marines used: little tents, one guy sleeping in a normal, pretty much civilian tent that he is responsible for. It's just part of his equipment. If we had had some of those, it would have helped. We slept in the helicopter. It really wasn't bad, but if we are going to have tents, it should be those little ones.

Also, the team concept, in general, is a little hard to work with because it is just three crews and three aircraft. So, there is no one there to hold down the fort when crews are out flying missions or sleeping. If I had any way of doing it over again, I would beg for two extra soldiers to come with us. I don't even care who they are, just two motivated soldiers. When we hit the ground their sole purpose in life would be get out with one large tent and set that thing up, and get electricity in there, and pull twelve hour shifts – or we could have three guys pulling eight hour shifts. They would just sort of sit in that tent and tell us, "Hey, while you were out flying this mission, this and that happened. I logged it here and I here is the newest INTEL information. I posted it right here so you can look at it whenever you want." This one large tent that we have for the entire team would be a place where those night crews could come in and try stay awake, because there was nowhere for them to be at night. This would allow them to reverse out their sleep cycles a little bit. It was pretty much impossible for our crews to stay awake at night just lying in their dark helicopters.

So all of the teams' aircrew members could go into this tent and relax and review all of the critical information. Those couple of soldiers (I don't care if they are even from the Dining Facility) would just be there to set up that tent and help us out. That would be so invaluable.

So that's the equipment and the team organization ideas that I put in our AAR. Another thing that could definitely be improved was communication equipment. That's partly because of the limitations of our avionics. At low altitudes, most radio communication clarity will suffer. We flew at about 30 feet as fast as we can go, and communication was just intermittent at best.

The Marines were trying to run the entire air war from the DASC, which is obviously on the ground. However, any radio transmitting from ground level is extremely limited. We usually couldn't talk to the DASC until we were about ten kilometers out. That was pretty ridiculous.

The Marines had an airborne helicopter radio relay that talked to us, but it didn't have any authority; it was just a relay. I hope the Marines gained a lot of lessons learned from that. I don't know if they would ever operate like that again. They pretty much need an AWACS or something like that.

The satellite phones that we had were inexpensive. They are $1,300 or something like that, and they gave us effective communication back to our Company Headquarters. A UHF radio in a Black Hawk is $25,000 or so, so if you compare the cost of a UHF radio to a satellite phone, it seems ridiculous.

There's one other thing I was going to say: the idea that the team and the aircraft are just kind of out there by ourselves. No matter who says they are supporting us, one thing you can never forget is that the team is responsible for itself. So the more self-reliant we are, the better, in every way: communication, support and all that. That is why it pays to not have very much equipment, but just enough to support yourself.

If you have a generator, a very small generator that gives you electricity, you have a bit less to worry about. If you have a good way of getting your own water and food from the rear, that also can help you. Our support from the company headquarters was all right. It was there when we needed it, about 50 percent of the time. They were pretty good about getting up north, but it was difficult for them as we advanced farther towards Baghdad. As we went farther north, it was obviously a lot longer legs, and at a certain point it just got really hard for them to come up. But they were good about getting us water, mail, and maintenance parts.

The Marines also gave us food and water, but my point really is that the more self-reliant we were, the easier and less complicated it got, because there were times when they just

sort of forgot about us. They wanted to worry about killing Iraqis and not what's up with Army MEDEVAC.

Q: Getting back to the Marines, how would you compare their culture with the Army?

A: They have good and bad aspects. I think they get away from a lot of the baloney in certain respects. They are willing to adapt to whatever new thing comes along. It seemed to me they were pretty adaptable and they also were open to suggestions. I mean, that's probably just the personalities of the folks that I worked with. But, I really do think that sometimes they get away from some of the self-imposed bureaucracy, the reporting requirements and all that stuff.

However, I think the way they were organized sometimes lent itself to confusion. Maybe it is just because they are not used to doing those long chains of support and all that, but the way they tried to control their aircraft wasn't fully worked out. We'd be trying to get intelligence information or just trying to make sure that everything was accounted for as far as, "Is this what we're supposed to be doing? Is it safe to fly here, and what's the plan?" Sometimes there really wasn't a plan, but that might not just be the Marines, it might be everyone.

It is easy to just sort of armchair quarterback and say, "There should be a plan here." We were just looking for someone to take accountability for us sometimes, but there was no one. We wanted someone to say, "Okay, Army MEDEVAC, we are looking after you. We've got this arranged for you." So that's one minus. But like I said, they were real good with adapting and overcoming.

Q: Was this experience easier or harder than what you expected it to be?

A: It was easier, I guess. I always thought war would be: "I am going to be in the best physical shape of my life. I am going to be fine tuned, a sharp-edged sword, and I am just going to go in there and it is going to be the hardest thing I ever do. It is going to be like Ranger School. I'm not going to get any sleep or food and I am just going to fly for days and not get any rest."

That was my impression of what war was going to be like. But, you know, it was hard, but not the test of a lifetime I thought it was going to be. There were some stressful things, but I think we did what we had to in order to accomplish our mission. We were conserving our strength for when it would be really necessary, and we reacted to what we thought we needed to do.

There was not perfection out there. We weren't necessarily trained to accomplish, or familiar with exactly what we needed to do. The way we executed our support plan for the Marine forces wasn't exactly perfect. Things weren't worked out perfectly. There wasn't a plan that said, "This is the way it is going to happen." So, things had to be

worked out as we went along.

For example, our company operations section wanted us to report back all the time on this and that stat, something I just hadn't considered much prior to departing north. None of us figured it out before I left, so it was something I was figuring out while out there. "Okay, what do you want from me?" And I'd send it back.

It was common sense, everyone knew that we were going to have to report back, but we just didn't get to it in time. So it was a thing that we had to do while I was out there. And all those problems with the equipment, and the way we operated on a daily basis: we talked about that before we went North, but we had to adapt when we actually executed.

We sent back all the tents and stuff that we originally brought with us. About two-thirds of the way through the combat, we had the Company-main come and get it and take it back. We discussed all that before, but we didn't know exactly what was going to work. As far as sleeping, we took what sleep we could get, and if we got enough sleep, we were happy about it. If we could get Coca Cola brought up to us, we did. All that stuff just made it easier, so that if it ever got really, really bad, we could say, "At least I had a Coke about a week ago, and that makes me happy."

But I can't see staying up and not sleeping when you can go to sleep.

Q: Anything else you want to talk about?

A: I don't think so. I guess I kind of talked myself out.

Q: How would you respond if someone asked you years from now about how you would you like to have this experience remembered?

A: Well, let's see. I hope that something positive comes from us being over there. For me personally, I'll always remember the folks I was with, especially the 30 days when the major portion of the fighting was actually going on. The crew I flew with, us four individuals, that's always going to be a real crisp, clear memory. And some of the stuff, like the first time we ever went into Iraq, that first mission I ever had into Iraq – I remember looking at those guys and going, "Okay, this is the real thing." Maybe above all, I will remember returning home to Ft. Benning. All of our families were waiting for us in our hangar at the airfield. Seeing my wife again made that one of the best days of my life. I'll always remember that. I guess that's it.

Q: Thank you very much.

A: Thank you.

Q: And thank you for what you've done. Welcome home.

A: Thank you.

AMEDD ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM
INTERVIEW OIF 071

INTERVIEW WITH
CPT THOMAS DAX MALLORY
498TH MEDICAL COMPANY (AIR AMBULANCE)

CONDUCTED BY
COL RICHARD VAN NESS GINN, USA, RET.
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA
20 AUGUST 2003

OFFICE OF MEDICAL HISTORY
OFFICE OF THE SURGEON GENERAL, U.S. ARMY/
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. ARMY MEDICAL COMMAND
FALLS CHURCH, VIRGINIA

Q: The date is 20 August 2003 and I am interviewing CPT Thomas D. Mallory, the Maintenance Officer for the 498th.

CPT Mallory, tell us about yourself, where you are from, where you went to school, and your family.

A: I am a military brat. My dad is a retired CW4 intelligence officer. I call Tupelo, Mississippi home. I grew up everywhere else. I went to high school at Fort Campbell, and from there I went to Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, and through ROTC got my commission.

Luckily, I got to join the Army and come back to Georgia. When I went to flight school, I came back to Georgia. I have been to Korea and Georgia. That's about it, prior to this.

Q: And then, of course, Iraq.

A: Exactly.

Q: Are you married?

A: Yes, sir, I am. I've got a wife and no kids.

Q: How were things for your wife while you were deployed?

A: She's very independent, so she did really well for herself. She had a stable job, and her family is in Macon, Georgia, two hours away.

Q: Well, that's good. How was it once you got over there?

A: Once we got over there, the maintenance units set up operations mostly out of Ali Al Salem, and I would stay there as a maintenance officer. That's where the majority of the aircraft would come back and that's where we had the repair facilities. I then acted as a regular line pilot as well, as a PIC on some missions. Or I'd go forward and recover damaged or broken aircraft and bring them back.

Q: What was your greatest maintenance problem – sand, I guess?

A: Yes, sir. We were really lucky. For the three years prior we had won the Army Master Readiness, Operational Readiness Award for CONUS MEDEVAC units. So our aircraft were in good shape going over there, which I think contributed to us making it through 946 hours of flight time within 30 days, and not having any significant major problems.

But we did have a threat from ground-to air missiles. We knew there were a lot of Stingers that we had sold to that area. We didn't know how many were actually in Iraq

or how many they had available, so we really wanted to make sure the pilots were protected as much as possible for aircraft survivability.

Q: How did you fix the disco balls (ALQ-144)? Take them all apart and clean them up?

A: Well, at our level of maintenance, we're not really supposed to be authorized to take them apart. That's what's called an AVIM or intermediate level task. Because we were located with the Marine Corps, we didn't have direct AVIM support worked out, or how we were going to do inter-service support. So we just found some of their guys who were smart on it and some of our guys who were smart on it, and did the maintenance at our level, as much as we could.

They had different versions of the (ALQ-144) on the ships that were used for their maintenance re-supply points. So, if we had parts that were bad, sometimes we could coordinate with them to bring us a part off the ship. We worked it that way.

Q: How was it being with the Marines?

A: It was interesting. I was sharing a hangar with four other squadrons. My job is an O-3 [captain] in charge of the maintenance for fourteen aircraft. Their equivalent is an O-4 [major] position, and he is in charge of six to eight aircraft. So I've got over twice as many aircraft, yet I am an O-3 with less assets and personnel.

They really weren't set up for sustainment operations, so they really didn't seem to have a good maintenance plan. We tried to work with them, and the way we do our plans. We do what is called DART, Downed Aircraft Recovery Teams, and plan the point of no return, where the aircraft can no longer come back to us for repair. So we push one up to them and things like that.

The Marine Corps seemed to just push all their assets forward and tried to work out the details once they got there. They really didn't seem to have a good plan to recover downed aircraft once they started getting engaged in battle. When I asked them what their plan was to recover an aircraft once it had gone past an arbitrary point in the sand – basically, toward the front line of troops – they were more concerned with recovering their personnel. Eventually they will get the aircraft, after they destroy anything secret on it. If it never came back to them, they didn't seem too concerned about it.

But the battle moved so quickly that any aircraft that crashed (I think they lost seven) they were able to recover in a timely manner, because there weren't any definite lines of battle where the aircraft went down behind enemy lines. There were always just pockets of fighting. So they were able to get their aircraft back either on a flat bed truck, on the convoys, or even try to sling load some of their aircraft out. But luckily we didn't even have one aircraft take a round as far as I know, and I've looked at all of them.

Q: That's pretty remarkable.

A: For flying twice as much as they did, going into areas where they wouldn't go into, we got guys who were being shot at, but for whatever reason the bullets just never hit the aircraft.

They did have a robust maintenance program, I guess, because everything was right there on the ship, and they could push back to it. There pretty much wasn't anything they couldn't fix. They weren't used to working in the sand very much because they don't have the sand protection on their aircraft like we did, so they were going through engines quite a bit. We didn't go through any engines while we were over there.

Q: What is that protection within the engine?

A: The Sikorsky Black Hawk runs a General Electric T700 engine. It has what is called a "particle separator" on the front of it, which, as it ingests air and sand, spins the air and sand through a centrifuge. The sand particles being heavier than air get slung to the outside, and then they get ejected overboard before the air, which would be left in the middle, gets directed into the engine. It is a really smart design and works really well.

Q: Some guy was smart.

A: Exactly. The Cobras, the CH-53s and the Hueys don't have that type of system. They have what's called swirl vanes, which are an older type of particle separation that doesn't work very well for real fine sand.

Marine operations are mostly over water and beaches, where it is coarse sand. So that works fine in that area, but where we were at, the sand was almost like talcum powder so their swirl vanes really didn't protect their engines very well.

Q: How was the culture of the Marines? How would you define that difference?

A: Their lower enlisted seemed to be a lot better trained and a lot more responsible than our lower enlisted. They would have corporals filling positions and doing jobs that we would have E-6s doing. And they were doing really well at it.

I don't know if it is just the way they are trained, or the way they are brought up and raised from baby Marines, but I was routinely working with E-4s and E-5s who were more technically and tactically proficient at aircraft maintenance than my E-5s and E-6s, and in some cases E-7s, just because our guys don't always work in their MOS.

It seems like in the Marine Corps, if you are hired to be a hydraulic repairman, then that's all you do, you work hydraulics. You don't get shuffled off somewhere to hand out towels at the gym, or work at a range, or be the re-enlistment NCO or something like

that. You are hired to do a job and that's the job you do. I guess they have limited assets in the Marine Corps, so they put more emphasis on knowing your job.

They don't get the budgets that everyone else gets, so they put more emphasis in maintaining their equipment. They don't have Apaches; they are still flying Hueys and Cobras. The aircraft they were flying are 1960 models. They take more pride in maintaining the aircraft, because they are older and it takes more to maintain them.

Q: What was their reaction to having some Army people around?

A: They really didn't seem to mind too much. We stayed out of their way and they stayed out of our way. They really didn't seem too concerned. Initially, when we showed up, there was a hangar that we thought we'd be able to use for aircraft maintenance. I was outnumbered and pretty much directed that, "No, the aircraft hangar is now going to be office space." They divided it up into workshop areas, and we had to do all our maintenance outside.

In my line of thinking, an aircraft hangar is supposed to be for aircraft maintenance. Now we are outside with blowing sand, with open fuel cells, open hydraulic lines. It is really hard to keep that stuff clean when you are trying to protect it while you are doing repairs or whatever. Their aircraft were all grey, light color. Ours were dark green, so by ten o'clock in the morning you couldn't be on top of an aircraft if it was sitting outside, because it is just too hot. It would almost pull the skin off you. It is probably 30 or 40 degrees hotter on top of the aircraft than it would be down on the ground.

We tried to do most of our maintenance either late in the evenings or early in the mornings, because during the middle of the day, you just couldn't touch the aircraft, they were so hot.

Q: Did that stop them from working on the grey painted aircraft?

A: No sir, they actually did the majority of their work at night also. They did their in-hangar work, their shop work, and component repair during the day, and then at night they'd go out and install the components.

They ran 24-hour maintenance. We didn't have the personnel to run 24-hour maintenance because we are only a company and they were a squadron. A complete Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron was there to support them. So they would do split shifts, and did most of their component replacement on the aircraft in the evenings. The component repair was done during the day, from what I could tell.

Q: Of course you are a Medical Service Corps officer in the Dustoff business.

A: Yes, sir.

Q: Where do you pick up the maintenance specialty? Are there courses for that?

A: Yes, sir. Every MEDEVAC unit has a maintenance platoon to handle organic maintenance at the unit level. The maintenance platoon leader is a captain. You go to the Maintenance Test Pilot Course and become a test pilot, and the Maintenance Manager's Course to learn how the supply system works for parts, and what you can and can't do.

I have any number of warrant officers who are maintenance track [in the aviation maintenance career track] who work for me as well, and they are test pilots.

Q: Was this something that you were particularly drawn to?

A: Yes, sir. I have always taken apart cuckoo clocks and things like that, so I think I'd go crazy if I was sitting in an office. I am hardly ever in my office. I'm mostly out working on the aircraft, turning wrenches or something like that. My guys kind of joke and tell me I'll get a job at Jiffy Lube when I retire. So, it's a lot of fun.

I like the interaction with the crew chiefs, because the crew chiefs are a very tight group of people. On the aircraft, you have a lot more respect for my enlisted guys, and I think they have more respect for the officers who are on the maintenance side as opposed to just a regular line pilot who shows up, takes the keys to the aircraft, flies it, breaks it, brings it back and then goes home. We're out there with them most of the time until six or seven or eight o'clock at night, helping them fix the aircraft and troubleshoot.

Q: Do you have any hobbies that involve taking things apart and putting them back together again?

A: Mostly it is motorcycles and muscle cars. I've got a Corvette and a motorcycle and a couple things like that. So even when I get off work here, I just go home and take something else apart and work on it.

Q: What year Corvette?

A: I've got a '73 with a 454 and a four speed.

Q: You're moving into the classic range.

A: It's moving that way. It's the only year that Corvette had chrome bumpers in the rear, polyurethane in the front, or a fiberglass front bumper.

Q: You're eligible for an antique plate, aren't you?

A: Yes, sir. I don't drive it that often right now. Just did a body-off restoration, and I haven't gotten the body back on the frame yet.

Q: You did that in the front of your quarters? Do you have a garage?

A: I have a carport. I did it in the carport.

Q: Oh, Lord.

A: My wife is very understanding.

Q: No transmission in the living room?

A: No, sir.

Q: How about the motorcycle? What's that?

A: It's a Yamaha V-Max. It is a muscle bike as well. I used to ride Harleys, but they are too slow so I wanted something a little faster. You can never go too fast or get there too quick. I'll play with it when I get home tonight, probably.

Q: So you've got oil in the blood?

A: Yes, sir. In the maintenance job you either have a strong desire to do it or you are going to do it very poorly. I've seen too many people say, "Yeah, I'll track maintenance," just because it is something to do. Something other than sitting in the office or being an operations guy or a personnel guy. Then they get in the job and find out they hate it and it reflects.

That's why I try to discourage people from tracking maintenance unless I know they really enjoy it, because you are going to get burned out in it. (And pretty much any other maintenance guy will tell you the same thing). You are here longer than anyone else during the day. You know, fixing aircraft so they can fly them the next day just to know that they are going to go out and get broken and you've got to come back and fix them again.

Q: What's the biggest challenge to keeping the Black Hawk flying?

A: Probably electrical problems. There are miles and miles of wire bundles in there. The hydraulics are not too bad; it is a good system. But the electronics they tried to digitize and make the Black Hawk that much different from the Huey. It is a great platform when it works, and it works correctly 90 percent of the time.

There are computers that might get a glitch because one wire is too close to another wire. Even though they are both in the same wire bundle and are shielded, after fifteen years of flying they might rub a little bare spot, but you don't know where that bare spot is. You just get an indication something is not right. So now you are going from the nose of the aircraft to the tail of the aircraft, trying to find one little rub spot on one wire among miles of wire. It can be frustrating.

Q: And take you a long time.

A: Also, it is built on, late '60's/early '70's technology. If you were to replace all of the components that are on it with modern equipment, it would probably drop 3,000 pounds off the aircraft.

Q: That's incredible.

A: Just the amount of wire. If you went to fiber optics – if you wanted to fly by wire instead of push-pull tubes, you could save a lot of weight, which the infantry guys would interpolate as, "Well, you can carry more people, then." So we wouldn't gain anything. We tell them we can only carry this many people because of the weight, or we can only sling load this much because of the weight of the aircraft. But if we made the aircraft lighter, then they would say, "Oh, now you can carry this much more." So, we're not gaining anything.

Q: What kind of job will you get after this?

A: Well, I'm on my way to Honduras. I'll be a detachment commander down there for a year, and eventually, long term, project manager for the UH-60 up at Redstone [Redstone Arsenal in Alabama]. There's a Medical Service Corps guy who works there.

Q: Is this for the Q model?

A: Well, they work with the Q model or the Mike Model.

Q: What's the Mike?

A: The Q model is initially what they were going to call the MEDEVAC version. I think they did away with that terminology and they are just going to call it the Mike Model. That's the next generation upgrade.

Q: So you can really keep your hand in the guts of the maintenance thing?

A: Yes, I don't want to be stuck in an office anywhere.

Q: You are pretty well lined up in the industry, when you leave the Army, right?

A: Yes, maybe with Lockheed Martin or Sikorsky or Raytheon, some civilian contract maintenance. I've got a thirteen-person civilian contract maintenance team here.

Q: Did any of those go with you to Iraq?

A: No, sir. That was kind of a problem. I initially wanted them to go with us. I was told they couldn't go, but I wasn't told why. Once I got over there I found out it was because Raytheon had gotten the contract for Iraq, so I couldn't bring Lockheed Martin personnel in to be paid with money that was designated for Raytheon.

If I had known or had more time, they could have terminated their jobs here at Lockheed Martin. I could have given Raytheon a list of names and they could have gotten hired and gone with us over there, as employees of Raytheon. But once we got over there, we went ahead and put in for a ten-person maintenance team to come to Ali Al Salem with us out of Camp Doha. So we had that work out for us, which was nice.

Q: Were they good?

A: They tried very hard. They had very little Black Hawk maintenance experience. Most of them came out of Kansas City, working on C-141s, C-130s and KC-135s and things like that. To an electrician, a wire is a wire is a wire. It doesn't matter. To an engine person, an engine is an engine is an engine. But once you get all the different components together, a Black Hawk is definitely a lot different than a C-141, even though a turbine engine is turbine engine, and a wire is a wire, and a computer is a computer. We probably had three or four guys who had Black Hawk experience on the civilian team, and the other guys were just airplane indifferent: just electricians or avionics guys or power plant.

It was better than not having anyone, but I would have much rather taken my Lockheed Martin team here, just because I had worked with them for the past two plus years and they had a lot of experience working on Black Hawks and they knew these particular Black Hawks. For example, they knew Aircraft #415 had a lot of electrical gremlins, for whatever reason, when you had to keep #415 going.

Q: It was like each helicopter had its own personality?

A: They all do.

Q: Do you enjoy flying?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: Which do you enjoy more, the flying or the maintenance?

A: Well, you do the maintenance so you can go fly.

Q: Then it's like a boat.

A: Exactly. I used to have an MG, and I'd work on it Monday through Fridays so I could drive it on Saturday and Sunday.

Q: We also have an MG. What year was yours?

A: It was a '75.

Q: Ours is a '53.

A: Chrome bumpers all the way around?

Q: Yes. The T series.

A: Those are nice.

Q: Well, what were some lessons learned in Iraq?

A: Civilian maintenance is a must, just because they have the inherent knowledge that our younger crew chiefs don't have. I'd say probably the majority of my crew chiefs have three years experience on a Black Hawk. These civilian guys are probably retired military, and have been working on airframes back to either OH-6s, OH-58s, Black Hawks, and Apaches. Just being around aircraft for that long, they've learned tricks of the trade.

Q: What's the average number of years of experience for one of these guys?

A: To include my NCOs, I would say it is probably seven years of actual aviation experience. They might have been in the Army longer than that, but not always working within their MOS or turning wrenches. There are other shops within the maintenance realm that they could have gone to and worked in as either an instructor at the school, teaching forms and records, or as a drill sergeant, or at AIT. But the actual turning of wrenches, to include my NCOs would be, at most, probably seven years of wrench-turning experience.

Q: How well prepared are the crew chiefs?

A: When they show up here from AIT, not prepared at all. I don't know what the program of instruction is at AIT, but they can only reproduce so many scenarios, and the helicopter, with as many moving parts as it has, they can't show them everything.

When they are teaching them forms and records, the schoolhouse is on one system, but when they get here, we're computerized on a totally different system. So they have to learn the computerized forms and records and log books and everything.

On how to be a crew chief, they can do that fine, which would mean making sure no one walks into the rotor disc, and putting oil in the engines and things of that nature. But when it comes to troubleshooting or a proper documentation on the aircraft, they don't come in with that kind of knowledge. For one hour of flight time you have three hours of maintenance that has to be done. If you remove a component, you have all the proper forms, historical records that you have to fill out. You have to document hours on that and everything else, but you can't get that knowledge in their school, however long it is. It just comes from being in a unit and seeing the aircraft.

When I was in Korea, we had a lot of cold weather problems that we don't have down here at Fort Benning. When you go to the desert, you have problems there that you don't have in Korea. So depending on where people get their experience, they are going to come in with a different base of knowledge. This helicopter is very climate temperamental. I think it was designed for a cold war-era type flying, which it does well, in probably the German and European theater.

In hot weather, it does OK, but it could be better. Over the years there have been so many modifications to it and upgrades, just adding more and more weight to it. We're flying the 1981, '82, '83, '84 model aircraft, and they don't have the power that the later models have.

We were more in tune with our power available margin with '95, '96, '97' model Black Hawks, just because they have more powerful engines and transmissions than we do.

Q: Do you still get up in that Huey [parked nearby] every now and then?

A: I wish I could. I'd love to get back in a Huey, but we don't have any in active Army TOE units. That's the National Guard unit that's here right now. I'd love to get back into it. I like flying the Huey better than I like flying the Black Hawk.

Q: Why?

A: I feel more in tune with it. You feel the aircraft in the Huey better. The Black Hawk, before you feel anything back through your feet or your hands, has already traveled through two or three hydraulic systems, a whole bunch of push pull tubes and everything else, before you actually get the feel of it in the cockpit. When you fly the Huey you feel every little twist and shake.

It is nice to have the power of the Black Hawk as compared to the Huey. Two engines are nice to have, as opposed to one, and the Black Hawk is a much better platform for flying instruments in the clouds. But the Huey is a great aircraft. It is more fun to fly. It's the difference between driving your MG and driving a Lincoln Town Car.

Q: It sounds like a sports car.

A: It is a lot of fun.

Q: They had good reliability too, right?

A: Yes, they did. You could fix most problems on a Huey, from what I'm told, with the pocketknife you keep in your tool bag and an extra can of oil. The Huey has a much simpler flight control design; hydraulics were really non-existent. It auto-rotated very well. But for whatever reason, the Army wanted two engines and wanted something to carry more for the assault platform. The Black Hawk can sling-load a Humvee and still carry troops and everything else, which is something a Huey couldn't do.

MEDEVAC-wise, if I were king of the Medical Service Corps, I would still have us flying the Hueys. The Huey was designed primarily as an aeromedical helicopter.

Q: Yes it was.

A: And that was its sole purpose.

Q: Most people don't realize that.

A: It does the same job as the Black Hawk, and for us it does it just as well. It would make it that much easier, because we don't fall under an Aviation Brigade. We are pretty much set up on our own on maintenance. If we had Hueys, that would lessen the maintenance load requirements, because they don't require as much maintenance. But the Army has decided to move away from the Huey, and everyone is going to Black Hawks.

Q: Is the Huey still being built?

A: I don't know if Bell is actually still building them or if they are just continuing to upgrade them, because the Navy still flies them, the Marine Corps still flies them. The Marines are flying Hueys over there: two blade, two engine Hueys. They've modified their Hueys for dual engines. They work great, and they use them as gunships.

The Air Force still flies Hueys, but the Army decided they didn't want to have any part of the Huey, and has minimized the differences of airframes. They only have to buy parts for Chinooks, Black Hawks, Apaches, and OH-58s.

Q: Well, a vote for the Huey. Any other lessons learned?

A: Right now we are trying to recover the aircraft because we beat the crap out of them. We have the same problems that they had coming back from Desert Storm, as far as parts availability to replace all of these things. The local manufacturers of parts cannot keep up with the demand from us requesting all of these parts, because they've been worn out, beat and not working correctly any more.

We have parts that are back-ordered which they are telling us not to expect to get until the October or November timeframe. So I've got aircraft that are just sitting, with very low maintenance that can be done without the parts availability. That's because we contract out for widgets. Well, for the past ten years a company has made ten widgets a year, because there's not that much of a demand. Now you've got every aviation unit in the world that we own over there flying, beating all the helicopters up and we come back and order 150 widgets. Well, we just increased their demand by fifteen times, and they can't keep up with it.

So, they are trying to spool up. There really wasn't a very good plan for the recovery of the aircraft. So the biggest concern that I have is getting parts, and trying to get them back to a "go to war" mission again.

Q: Do you have any of the Black Hawks up and running?

A: I think there were two test flights today. I took one out on a test flight yesterday, and I still had some problems with it. Today I had the one that I flew yesterday and another one out on a test flight. I'm thinking I heard them come back, so unless they tell me something else is wrong, they should be the first two that we have flyable.

Q: The one yesterday – what kind of problems were they?

A: Electrical problems for one. That was the biggest thing. We had to re-balance high-speed shafts and main rotor heads. We had to do a track and balance on that and on the tail, because if we take them apart to ship them and then you put them back together, you have to re-balance everything. While we were over there, we deferred a lot of maintenance, the normal routine inspections that we would do back here. During emergency operations you are allowed to defer maintenance, but once we got back here we had to go back and catch up on all the inspections that we deferred.

That's our biggest lesson learned. We can do all the wrench turning and we can work late and everything else, but we can't work without the parts. Then once we get parts availability, we're not the priority. The priority goes to the divisions, the assault units and things of that nature, not MEDEVAC.

Q: So right now it is kind of slow?

A: Yes, sir. It's slow for us, and the National Guard wants to go back home. They're telling us, "You've got to get the birds up." I'm saying, "Hey, give me some parts and I'll put them on the aircraft to make them run."

Q: So the National Guard is here to cover your normal missions at Fort Benning, including MAST?

A: Yes, sir. They are.

Q: Well, any other lessons?

A: None that I can really think of.

Q: Any particularly unusual events while you were in Iraq?

A: Every day was an unusual event. We did notice at Ali Al Salem – and you probably heard this from the other guys – the different living conditions between the Air Force side and the Army and the Marine Corps. There was a difference. The Air Force gets a huge amount of money, and to us, every E-1 and above gets their own three-bedroom house to live in. But the reality was very discouraging for us and the Marines living twelve men to a tent with no air conditioning. At the Air Force base, which we looked at every day but were not allowed to go on, they had two swimming pools, a burger bar, a cafeteria, air conditioned trailers and things of that nature.

Q: The Army and Marine Corps were not allowed on it?

A: We were not allowed to go on the Air Force base.

Q: And what was the reason?

A: The Commander for the Air Force side, I guess he was an O-6, said that these are Air Force facilities, and therefore Air Force personnel only.

Q: That doesn't sound like jointness, does it?

A: No, sir, and I believe some calls were made back to Congressmen. I don't know if anything ever came out of it or not, but it was very discouraging. You know, we would get at points where our showers were once every two weeks just because where we were they didn't have water but maybe one or two days a week.

Q: Was it called the Snake Pit?

A: Yes, sir. At Ali Al Salem, the Snake Pit, which was just desert before we moved in. So they were trying to put in water and everything, while the Air Force base had trailers with hot and cold running water and pressure all the time, washing machines. We didn't even have washing machines down where we were to do laundry. So you'd do laundry maybe once every two weeks. You'd wear the same flight suit for maybe five or six days at a time until it just got too funky to wear. Before they got wise to us sneaking up there, we'd run up there and try to take a shower.

The Air Force cut that down pretty quick as soon as they realized that we were coming up there. They made it one day a week we could up to the PX, and then they decided to get smart and move their PX off the base so that one day a week we could go up to a swimming pool. So it was almost like the scene from "Caddy Shack," where they have the caddy time from one to one fifteen. So as soon as they opened the gates, we had a whole bunch of Marines and Army guys rushing up there to jump in the pool, and they are all looking at us like we're second-class citizens. You know, we all make our choices.

Q: Well, so much for jointness.

A: It would be one thing if we knew what was going on but didn't have to see it every day.

By the time we left we were just starting to get some semi-reliable water down there. There are still porta-potties side by side by side, but that is better than using a hole, which is what we had to do for awhile. But just knowing that they had something better that we could see, it's almost like being third-class citizens.

Q: Well, that's a morale buster.

A: Yes, sir.

Q: Any other thoughts?

A: It's nothing that I thought war was going to be like. That was just because it was almost surreal, almost too much like what the movies portrayed than I would expect.

From being a pilot, you talk to other pilots and they give you the story, "there I was going in hot and heavy, and tracers flying around," and you think, nah, it is not going to be like that. And then, I'll be damned, you go in and there you are flying hot and heavy and tracers going by. You are looking, but you don't see someone shooting at you. You've got your radar lighting up, and people talking and pure chaos in the air. But there you are. It is just like, what's going on?

It was kind of neat. Not something I'd want to do again any time soon, but definitely we're all better aviators because of it. I think the officers are better officers and soldiers are better soldiers because of it. I think everyone definitely learned something.

Q: Well, thanks for what you did.

A: No problem.

AMEDD ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM
INTERVIEW OIF 066

INTERVIEW WITH
CW2 PAUL K. BRYANT
498TH MEDICAL COMPANY (AIR AMBULANCE)

CONDUCTED BY
COL RICHARD VAN NESS GINN, USA, RET.
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA
20 AUGUST 2003

OFFICE OF MEDICAL HISTORY
OFFICE OF THE SURGEON GENERAL, U.S. ARMY/
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. ARMY MEDICAL COMMAND
FALLS CHURCH, VIRGINIA

Q: [I am Colonel Richard Van Ness Ginn, U. S. Army Retired, Historian with the Office of Medical History, Office of the Surgeon General, Falls Church, Virginia. I am at Fort Benning, Georgia, to interview members of the 498th Medical Company, Air Ambulance, who have just returned from Iraq.]

Today's date is 20 August 2003, and this is CW2 Paul K. Bryant. Mr. Bryant, a little bit about your background, where you are from, schools, and so on.

A: I'm from Honolulu, Hawaii and I joined the Air National Guard (Air Guard) in Hawaii in 1987. In 1994, I switched over to the Army and the 67 Tango MOS as a crew chief. In 1995, I got accepted to Army Flight School, and in 1996 I went to flight school at Fort Rucker.

Q: Did you go to school in Hawaii?

A: I went to East St. Louis High School. It's a Catholic school, a private school.

Q: Did you do any college?

A: I'm taking college courses right now, I have possibly 115 college credits, but only 93 are going towards my degree. I was trying to finish up my degree prior to deploying to Kuwait, through the University of Embry Riddle.

Q: And what will your degree be in?

A: It will be professional aeronautics.

Q: How was flight school?

A: It was fun. It was pretty easy. I had my private airplane license, so the beginning of flight school was just a review. It was just learning to fly a helicopter. And it was fun, too.

Q: So, for you it was essentially just a transition to rotary aircraft

A: Yes, sir.

Q: Are you married? Any kids? One girl?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: You've had other deployments.

A: Yes, sir.

Q: Where have you been?

A Well, I've been in the 498th since 1997. In 2000 I went to Korea for one year. Then I came back to the 498th in 2001.

Q: And the family stayed here, I guess.

A: Yes, sir. My family has been here at Ft. Benning since 1997. While I was in the 498th, my first deployment was for Hurricane Mitch relief in 1998. It was after Thanksgiving, right before Christmas, when we were told we had to leave. So we just packed up our bags and took off and went to Guatemala for the Hurricane Mitch relief. We had a total of nine or twelve aircraft.

We had a FSMT in Guatemala, another FSMT in Nicaragua, and I believe our ASMT headquarters went to El Salvador.

Q: How did the aircraft get to Guatemala?

A: We loaded up the aircraft on C-5s. There were approximately three to four C-5s that we had to use to take all our equipment to Guatemala.

Q: How long were you in Guatemala?

A: We landed in Guatemala December 1, and the last team came home in March. We started sending people home in January.

Q: What were your flight assignments, before you got to the 498th?

A: Just the 498th sir.

Q: So you've been with Dustoff all along?

A: Minus that one year in Korea. I was in the 2-2 Aviation**,** in the Air Assault Battalion.

Q: What were you flying there?

A: UH-60s, sir,

Q: Were they slicks?

A: Yeah, both sir, slicks and also Triple S.

Q: How about the Dustoff flying?

A: I love Dustoff. You never know where you are going to go, when you are going to go. I've been on highways, I've been to schools.

I've been at highways, schools, parking lots, and big building areas. Where else have I been? In Central America, I've been on the beach. In Egypt, desert; in fact, I went to Egypt with the 498th also, for Exercise Bright Star 2000, but it was in fiscal year 1999. [Bright Star 2000, September - November 1999]

Q: Plus you had your experience in Korea.

A: Yes, sir. Becoming a Dustoff pilot, I realized that we had a little bit more experience in going to different landing zones. Air assault operations require a Landing Zone Survey, when a safety officer goes out to figure out if it is safe enough for a certain amount of helicopters to land in that area, to make sure all the obstacles are clear, and they can land, for example, six aircraft.

But in Dustoff, you have no idea where you are going to land. Half the time you are orbiting, trying to find a place to land. We've been in some hairy places that we had to land the helicopters in little holes.

Because we have four crewmembers aboard – the pilot, co-pilot, a medic and a crew chief – you have eyes covering the whole sector, from 12 o'clock all the way back to 12 o'clock. That makes a big difference in landing in these areas.

Q: How many hours do you have now?

A: Total helicopter time: I believe around 1400 or 1500 hours, and fixed wing only around 250 hours – and that's single engine fixed wing.

Q: How was it for your family in the deployment with your being gone?

A: My wife said this is the hardest: she never knew how I was once the war kicked off. I didn't speak to her for approximately 14 or 15 days, and she was watching everything on the news. She said it was really tough.

Q: The news wasn't good at first. It was very confusing. How about family support activities, etc.?

A: I had care packages from aunts that I never knew, from my mom, my other aunts and uncles, my brother-in-law, my sisters-in-law, my father-in-law. I was getting packages and support from everyone.

Q: How about the support here at Fort Benning?

A: The support here is pretty good. It is just that for my wife, it was tough for her. I guess she tried to get out to the group [Family Support Group], but it is hard dealing with other family members who are going through the same pain. So she'd try to stay away and try to just...I guess she became a hermit for a while.

At the beginning she was out there with the family support group, and then after listening to things going on, just listening to people out there, she got more negative energy than positive energy.

Q: So it was actually sort of aggravating.

A: Yes, sir. And then she slowly stopped talking to a lot of family members – her brothers, sisters – because they didn't understand what she was going through. Things that she thought were really minute, things that shouldn't matter to brothers and sisters – little things that she thought was little, they found nervous and made it worse than what it actually was.

Q: So they kind of magnified things?

A: Magnified things. She just holed up awhile, until she got, I guess, the first phone call. We were almost into Baghdad when I was able to call. I didn't realize that the Marines (we were supporting the Marines) had this DSN tap phone (or some kind of phone). Afterwards she felt a lot better, and she was able to get out again and speak to them. It was just her not knowing what was going on and watching the news.

Q: That's tough. How about the mail? Was that able to get through to you?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: And back to her?

A: I didn't write. I didn't want her to know what was going on, so I didn't mail to her until I think maybe around 12 to 14 days into the war, and finally I sent her mail. Just one, just chicken scratch, just on the fly. But the mail to us, we were getting mail all the time.

Q: Was it coming to you through the Marines?

A: We were getting the mail from our own unit, from our headquarters.

Q: So it was actually coming through the regular Army postal set up?

A: It went through the Army system. Our commander would send an aircraft up to give us water, to give us MREs, and to give us our mail.

Q: How was the reintegration back into Fort Benning when you redeployed?

A: The reintegration back with my family was tough, sir. It is just that my wife had little boo-boos, what I considered minor, that I didn't really care about. I mean, I did care, but after flying for awhile, I had no emotions because we had a lot of hurt soldiers – hurt Marines, dead Marines. Being the pilot in command, I can't let my emotions get involved or I won't be able to fly in the conditions that we were flying in; and I was responsible for three other lives.

So I kind of separated myself from the pain and the hurt of the people we were picking up. But we did it in an expedient amount of time. We got there, and we got there fast and safely, and made sure these patients were taken to the hospitals in a timely manner.

But it is seeing everything, seeing the pain of other soldiers; I just had to separate myself emotionally.

Q: When you got back did you feel like you were on autopilot?

A: When I got back here I was numb, sir. No emotions. It took me awhile to get back into, I guess, reality, because over there, we were moving a lot quicker and a lot faster. The petty things, what I consider little scratches here and there, what was going on with my family, didn't really matter, because of the conditions that we were living in up there.

Q: Has that process been completed by now for you?

A: Slowly.

Q: How about the rest of the guys in your unit? What's it like for them? Is it similar?

A: I guess no one is really talking to each other about what's going on, but I listen to the others talk. I guess a lot of the guys were having a hard time with their wives – not with their wives, but just trying to connect. With my wife, I'm trying to connect with her and trying to look eye-to-eye with her, but we keep on missing. Now we are slowly starting to see eye-to-eye with each other. But it was tough coming back. It was tough, really tough.

I guess the first five days being back together was pretty easy, but then our true feelings started coming out after awhile. Then it got pretty tough, sir.

Q: Well, how about being with the Marines?

A: We were flying for the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force; I believe he was a two star general up there. We were supporting them. We had six helicopters supporting its

DASC. They have four DASCs, so we were leap-frogging every other day, sometimes twice a day.

Since we had a lot of gear with us, we pretty much were self-sustained. We had our six helicopters, and we just slept in the aircraft. We kept unloading our stuff off the aircraft when we were pulling duty, and the non-duty bird would load all the equipment back on their bird when we jumped. But we were constantly jumping, jumping, jumping, jumping. I guess we didn't realize we were going to jump that many times. Eventually, we got rid of a lot of equipment. We sent back a lot.

The Marines – I like their concept. For me, it feels like how all the services should be. They're like old Army, from what I hear. That's how they are. The Marines are really respectful. When they get an order, they do it. No back talk.

The Army is a little bit different now, sir. But I really enjoyed working with the Marines.

Q: What were your missions like?

A: I flew mostly in the evening to the early morning shifts. A lot of my missions were under NVGs during the night. A lot of times we flew inadvertent IMC. It was considered flying with no visual. It just snuck up on us. So most of our flights were just trusting our artificial horizon, our radar altimeter, our regular altimeter, and our GPS.

Q: How does a radar altimeter differ from a regular altimeter?

A: The radar altimeter will give you the actual above ground level, and the barometric altimeter will give you the elevation based on the mean sea level.

Q: Right, so you don't know how far above the actual ground you are, which makes a difference, doesn't it?

A: Unless you have the actual barometric altimeter setting.

Q: How long have our helicopters had a radar altimeter? Has that been the standard for some time?

A: Ever since I've been in the service. I am not sure how long. The Huey guys may not have it. It's pretty accurate, sir.

Q: However, for a landing, you still gotta get...

A: Visual, yes, sir. A lot of times we were coming in and we'd dust out, and then it is like a touchy-feely thing, like we were touching and feeling for the ground, but not actually seeing it, and we'd eventually plant it in there.

I believe there were some aircraft that had some hard landings out there. But it is tough. You really have to work as a team to survive out there. Many times we missed wires, towers, and poles. They'll just sneak up on you.

We have a map that's given to us, but a lot of these maps – just like Korea – don't have all the wires, don't have all the towers on there.

So, because we have four personnel on board who're actually looking, seeing out there, keeping the area clean and not actually looking down, manning a gun, it helped us stay alive.

I think the Marines had several helicopters that hit wires and I could see why. It is because they have guys just looking down, looking for the enemy. But we have guys just looking for wires, and towers and keeping us safe. I'm thinking that's why we all came back, and some of the Marines didn't. I know there was a couple of Black Hawks crashed out there. I am not sure why they crashed. But for me, the reason why I think we survived was because of all our crewmembers. There's times when we would be flying and our crew chief would be yelling "Wires, wires" and we just pulled it up.

Q: What was your scariest flight?

A: My scariest flight was when we almost hit a tower in Baghdad. The tower was like 600 feet.

Q: Was this was for commo or power?

A: It's like a big huge radio tower. And it just snuck up on us. We were in Baghdad; there were fires, buildings on fire, smoke all over the place. We were headed towards this one area to pick up some patients, and then I was down and all of a sudden… It's hard to see at night with all the smoke and dust on the NVGs. All I heard was somebody yell "tower".

I was on the map trying to figure out where these guys were at, and I looked up and all of a sudden a tower was right in our face. I grabbed on – I just crunched over and I thought we were going to die. Somehow, someway the co-pilot maneuvered around. I guess he did something with the Black Hawk. He did some maneuver so we missed the tower. Then the guy wires were coming across, and I was like, "Oh." But we missed the guy wires also.

After I closed my eyes and started curling up. A few seconds later we were still alive and I looked back and the tower was behind us. I started cheering, because I thought we were a goner.

After that I knew pretty much I was going to make it home. Because there is no way, no way, we should have missed that.

Q: You couldn't fly that route if you had to for a demonstration, could you?

A: No, sir. I don't know how we got out of it, sir.

Q: What was the typical day?

A: A typical day – we were flying an average of, say, 7 to 10 hours a day. It was one mission after another after another, after another.

Q: What is considered a normally fatiguing day flying under stateside training conditions?

A: Five hours, six hours; five under NVGs, probably around eight for a daylight flying – all eight hours for just daytime only. But there we were flying a lot of hours under NVGs, and it was combat, so we went ahead and did it. After awhile our bodies got used to it. We were drained, but we kept on going.

Q: What kinds of pickups were you doing? What would be a light, an average, a heavy or God-awful pickup?

A: We picked up everybody – EPWs, we picked up civilians, we picked up Marines, and the average was around four patients. And they always wanted to throw in more.

Q: What kind of injuries?

A: Gunshot wounds, grenades. A lot of their civilians were stepping on mines, blowing off legs, or neurological injury: brain, head wounds. This lady we picked up, her brain matter was draining out and the Marines and Navy worked together. They couldn't, I guess, give her any anesthetic, because it had to deal with her brain.

One instance that I remember, one of the Marine helicopters came flying in with this one guy. They were carrying him into our aircraft, and by the time we picked up and left, the patient was already dead.

This Marine was built like a rock. He was in tiptop shape. He didn't have a shirt on, but he had his flight vest on and he was built like a statue. He was really built. After seeing that kid getting killed (this was before the tower incident) after seeing this kid getting killed with his head blown off, I was like, anybody can get hit. So, I guess with bullets it

didn't matter who you wanted to hit. I remember I was like, "Oh my gosh." This kid got hit, anybody can get hit.

They had his sweater over his head. The medic had to look at him, and I guess half his head was missing. They had to tie his shirt to keep his brain back in there. My medic, he's seen more than I've seen. I was up front and most of my flights were in the dark, so I couldn't see what was going on back there.

Q: Did you get in any hot LZs where you were being fired on?

A: I am not sure if we got fired on, we could have. We were flying ten feet off the ground at 140 knots, just moving along.

Q: How about when you actually were coming in for a pickup?

A: Under goggles, we could have been. I don't know. It seems like, we could have been. I saw a lot of flashing lights, like camera flashes, so I don't know if that was actually small weapons, smaller machine guns. If it was during the day I probably could have seen.

But there was one time that I remember getting shot at. It was after President Bush said the combat operation was over, so we started flying higher, and flew like around 400 feet at night in the dark. We had all the external lights off, so no one could see us, but they could hear us going by on the ground. I saw tracers going in front of us, and I just looked down and thought "no way." I asked my other crewmember, "are they shooting at us?" One person said, "no." But the crew chief could actually look down, and he said, "Yeah, they are shooting at us."

They were trying to shoot at us, and they were guessing to find out where we were at. So instead of shooting at us, they were shooting underneath us. And these were pretty nice size tracers. So if we would have been lower, at our low altitude, they would have hit us. Just all timing, I guess. I don't know, if it's your time, it's your time to go.

Q: Do you think your training had prepared you for what you got into?

A: I don't know. It never gets easier when you get out there. The training could have for basic flying, landing in areas. But it never got easier, sir. You never could get complacent. When you start to get complacent, things start happening. From what I heard, a lot of guys who crashed were experienced pilots that actually died. These were like CW4 IPs who crashed into, I guess, the side of a hill. Well, training can help in a sense, but once you get up there, I don't know what to say.

Q: How about your crew? How well prepared were they?

A: I had a good co-pilot, a good experienced medic and a young crew chief. What helped him was our medic. Our medic was experienced, so our medic helped him out there. So – what was the original question?

Q: How well prepared was your crew?

A: The medic was well prepared. The crew chief was good, but he was younger. He did a really good job for being a young guy.

Q: Just lacked experience.

A: Yes, sir.

Q: Was the medic a 91W, the new medical MOS?

A: I'm not sure what he was, but he has been around for a while.

Q: As a Dustoff pilot, do they give you any medical training?

A: No, we don't get really special instructions. We usually let the medic do everything in the back. He is in charge of the back of the aircraft. But as a Pilot in Command [PIC], we have to make sure that all his equipment is on board. We use a little checklist, and look at everything.

They have schools at Ft. Rucker that you can go to as a pilot to learn more about the medical side, but I haven't been to it yet.

Q: Will you stay here at the 498th?

A: I have a year left here at the 498th. I was supposed to get out of the Army in June of this year, when six years were up after flight school. But I'm probably going to stick it out another ten years.

Q: Good.

A: I am not sure where I am going to go from here. I'll find out six months from now.

Q: And you don't have any idea if it will be Dustoff or general aviation?

A: Hopefully, I can go into another Dustoff. I like Dustoff, because you are single-ship and you are pretty much in charge of your own life. In the multi-ships you have someone else behind you and in front of you. If they do one little mistake, they are going to end up crashing into you or if the guy in front stops early, you end up crashing into him.

So, I like Dustoff single-ship flying. But in air assault everything has to be in sync, and if it is not in sync, there is a chance of dying or crashing. I just like being in charge of my own life.

Q: I understand that a dedicated MEDEVAC was a new thing for the Marines. How did that go? What was your experience in dealing with the Marines and being with them?

A: With being with the Marines, gosh, how do I say it? It was a good experience being with them. At first they didn't understand the concept of Dustoff where you only pick up live patients, not KIA's. They were constantly trying to send us on KIA missions, not knowing the Army's rules (protocol I guess we call it) for MEDEVAC.

I enjoyed it. The experience was good. The biggest thing I got out of it is their discipline, from E-nothing all the way up to two-star general. When they were given an order, they did it. As to security: I didn't have to worry about my life being secured by the Marines.

We were briefed not to walk up to their sentries too fast because they will shoot. Their little sentries are privates and they are given an order to shoot if anybody walks up too quick. I guess their rules of engagement are different than our rules of engagement.

For example, there was one time a Huey crew member went out of our area to use the latrine, came back in, and one of the Marines threw him on the ground. It didn't matter if he had a military uniform or not, they had him on the ground until they could identify who he was.

So, I felt safe. I slept well every night, just knowing that these kids were out there protecting us. We would give them food, give them water, and give them candy. Whatever we would get, we'd share with them. I just felt safe being with them.

Q: How was the Marine reaction to you all?

A: They worked with us pretty well. Captain Salvetti, our FSMT leader worked directly with their medical personnel who gave us all the missions.

Q: That's the PET?

A: PET, yes sir. The PET. He would basically tell them, "Hey, this is what we've got to do and this is what you can and can't do." And then, I guess, things started to work out well.

Q: How was the face-to-face with these guys you were serving with?

A: It wasn't too bad. We had their pilots around our helicopter. I guess we got along good with their pilots, and they got along good with our pilots. They loved the Black Hawks.

Q: They don't have it?

A: No Black Hawks. Their Hueys have to go into the wind and get a running start to get off the ground, while we can just pick up and take off. It was pretty good. They treated us pretty well in that sense.

What amazed me out there was they have a lot of females pulling guard duty. I don't know if the Army does that. At the DASC they had a lot of females out there. When I walked in there, I looked out and I couldn't believe it, that they had that many females out there. They were out there pulling guard shift, they were out there with the PET, and they were out there with the DASCs and with the general out there.

It was a pretty good experience seeing females out there pulling duty and guarding the post. It is just different from what we've got in the Army. I just couldn't fathom seeing them out there, but they are out there.

Q: So you thought it was a good experience serving with the Marines?

A: Yes, sir. I thought it was good.

Q: How about Marine Corps Aviation, did you have much contact with how they operate?

A: Well, you're operating in their air space, and you have different rules. They were trying to give us routes: "Go this route, this route, this route." But the biggest thing that I found that was that someone was giving us call signs. They were mixing up our aircraft; they were giving the Dustoff some CH-46 missions (CASEVAC), which has M-60 machine guns.

They sent my aircraft into An Nasiriyah alone. We didn't know we were going until we actually got closer to it. We had to pick up some patients – I guess they thought we were a CH-46.

We landed in an LZ, and we could see vehicles and a lot of the camouflage. Jessica Lynch, the female that got captured, was still there when we landed in that area in An Nasiriyah. Our medic and crew chief got out. We are looking around and no one moved. There was no movement. We were looking for the Marines to bring the patients.

But after looking around and seeing the vehicles, I realized where we were. I was telling these guys to get back in, but they continued to look around for the patients. My medic is really into trying to save lives, which I am, too, but he takes it to heart.

So they looked around and finally got in the aircraft, and we took off. We started going back to get fuel, and we called the Marines and said we were heading back home. They said, "Well, you are not going to take the mission?" And we said, "No, we're not." So we continued on home. She [the PET action officer] said she was going to send another helicopter in there.

After that day, I talked to one of the other Marine pilots, a major, and he told me that someone was giving them missions that were supposed to be Dustoff missions that we were supposed to do. In the future, if they can just separate the Dustoff guys from the Marine CASEVAC helicopters, it would make a big difference. I guess we were lucky that nobody shot at us.

Q: So Marine CASEVAC does everything – general supply, everything.

A: Correct. They have two, I guess, two .50 cals on board. We had mostly side arms, nine-millimeter pistols. …(inaudible) of these guys coming by, because we're going to get smoked. When the Marine CASEVAC goes in, they have air cover protection. We had nothing going in there.

I don't know if you're going to talk to these guys, but the biggest thing is just getting the call signs confused, getting the aircraft confused.

Q: How about the Marines – did you run into any memorable characters?

A: Memorable? I guess, all of them. They would come out and use the latrine between our helicopters. I mean, actually drop their drawers, dig a hole and use it right there and bury it up. They were not, I guess, embarrassed about using the bathroom in front of people. And that was a unique situation. There were girls coming out, dropping their drawers, and just using the latrine. Girls, guys, it didn't matter. That is the most memorable thing to me. My jaw dropped when I saw this.

Then we started doing it, because everybody else was doing it. I had never seen that in the Army: "This is where the boys go, this is where the girls go – a big shelter." There, they just moved out and did whatever they felt like doing.

Q: The first time I saw that was running the Marine Corps marathon. You are running through the underpasses, and all of a sudden you see things you just don't expect.

A: They're a different breed. It was funny. Our jaws just dropped, like, "What are these people doing?" Things that they do, you can't do in the Army. Basically, you'd get in trouble for it.

Q: Did you have any way of judging what it was like with the Iraqi population? Did you get any impression of the people?

A: It was half and half. Certain areas, they'd wave at you, and looked like they were happy you're there. In other areas, they'd just sit there and just watch you, look at you. Those were the areas I didn't fly by again. They were probably looking at us, sizing us up and figuring that if we are going to come back that way, they are going to probably end up shooting us. It looked like they were thinking about doing something to us. The general population was pretty nice at the beginning, but now that I see the news, it's a lot different.

We were moving so quick and, that we didn't really have time to get out with the general population. The only thing I can say is guys were just looking at us, and we'd wave at them. Probably some of the guys didn't like us, but it was only like 10 percent of them that did that. The rest would wave. After combat operations were over a lot of people were waving at us. But in some little areas, they (I guess the veterans) would hear the helicopter and grab their kids and start running for their lives. It was funny, watching them run. We just watched them run. I guess they didn't know what was going on. They were in the middle of nowhere and seeing a big helicopter come by. There were some that would run and some would wave.

Q: You talked about jumping. What was the route you followed?

A: I guess our first jump was from here in North Kuwait, and then I believe we jumped here in Basrah and down here. Then we jumped so many different times, in little areas.

Q: And you all went west?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: Through An Nasiriyah?

A: An Nasiriyah – we went through. We didn't go in, but we were jumping back and forth in little areas. I guess we flew this back and forth, I guess this is the route – the road we went up. We just flew here, here, here, here and we jumped 15 times, all the way up into here, and then into southeast of Baghdad. Then we went east of Baghdad, then back into Baghdad. We just jumped back and forth. The basic route is from here all the way up to here. It was just back and forth, zigzagging all the way up into Baghdad and zigzagging back down.

Q: Where were your most intense operations?

A: Intense? I guess right at the beginning of the war.

Q: Just over the border from Kuwait and south of An Nasiriyah?

A: The Marines went to An Nasiriyah. The Iraqi people were waving the white flag, so the Marines opened their hatches. As soon as they opened their hatches, the Iraqi people there started shooting RPGs into their vehicles. I guess they wounded or killed about 70 something plus – that's the biggest destruction I've seen or heard.

They were going to send us in there, but they sent the CASEVAC. The CASEVAC brought them out I guess to one of their FSTs, and then we want and picked up four and took them down to Kuwait.

I guess that's the biggest operation or killing that happened while we were out there – An Nasiriyah. I guess a lot of things happened there. But up in Baghdad it wasn't that bad. It was mostly just around this area.

Q: What will you tell your grandkids was your greatest contribution?

A: Greatest contribution? Just able to save lives of Americans, just by being MEDEVAC, just saving their lives. That's about it.

Q: Thank you very much.

A: Thank you, sir.

Q: I'm glad you are home. Enjoy yourself. I appreciate your taking the time to talk.

A: Thank you, sir.

AMEDD ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM
INTERVIEW OIF 068

INTERVIEW WITH
CW2 ALBERT HILL
498TH MEDICAL COMPANY (AIR AMBULANCE)

CONDUCTED BY
COL RICHARD VAN NESS GINN, USA, RET.
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA
20 AUGUST 2003

OFFICE OF MEDICAL HISTORY
OFFICE OF THE SURGEON GENERAL, U.S. ARMY/
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. ARMY MEDICAL COMMAND
FALLS CHURCH, VIRGINIA

Q: Today is 20 August 2003. I'm talking now with CW2 Albert G. Hill. Mr. Hill, welcome. Glad you can take time for this interview.

A: My pleasure.

Q: Tell us a little bit about yourself.

A: I am from Jackson, Mississippi, married and I have two children. Just started school like a week and a half ago; boy and a girl.

Q: You've got a matched set there.

A: I am glad they're back in school. It takes a load off me, worrying about them being at home. I've been in the Army fourteen years now. I originally came in as light infantry at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, then went to Desert Storm (1990), so this is like my second go around.

I did that for about ten years and decided to make a change, switch over. I decided I'd go fly a little bit. So here I am. I went to flight school at Fort Rucker, and I decided I was going to come back to Fort Benning, and I've been here for a little bit over a year now. Great and wonderful things, and like you say, I got called back over there [Iraq] for a second go around.

Q: Were you a high school graduate when you came in?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: Any college?

A: I'm doing college while I've been in the military. Close to an associate's degree, but I haven't been pushing it as hard as I wanted to.

Q: Why did you join the Army?

A: At the time, it seemed like the thing to do. A lot of buddies in high school were joining the Army, plus I wanted to do something with myself, so I decided to get away from home and make something out of myself. I thought I was just going to come in for the college money, but after I was in, it wasn't that bad, so I started enjoying it.

Q: You figured you'd be a pilot some time?

A: That was the farthest thing from my mind. Never thought I'd be a pilot.

Q: So you've seen the Army from the ground up. Does your wife work?

A: Yes. She works.

Q: How was the deployment on her?

A: At times it was hard on her. She was used to it; she was like my girlfriend the first time. This time it helped her out by having friends back here, some of the wives that get together and talk to each other and support each other.

Q: How were the kids?

A: Oh, they were missing me; sad when everybody left. Of course, you're going to be sad in that situation. I talked to them on the telephone. We'd get plenty of chances to make phone calls from over there, so that was a big help. Got to call them every day if we wanted to.

Q: How about coming back and getting back into family life? How has that been?

A: Kind of slow getting back in the swing of things, her being in charge of the household and all that. She would send me on little errands, like "pay this bill." I remember one time I went in the bank to buy some money orders. I paid for the money orders, but I tried to leave without actually getting the money orders. "Oh, I'm sorry. I've been gone for a while." But everything went pretty smooth coming back.

Q: How were the support activities on post: legal, medical, dental, etc.?

A: Oh, that was just fine. When we went over there it was kind of slow, because I guess everybody was – how should I put it – the operations section, and how they run things, they weren't really used to it, so it was kind of slow. We'd go over there and we'd sit for hours, spend a whole day trying to get processed to go over there. Coming back it wasn't too bad. It went a lot smoother, so I guess they were used to it. They had a good system.

Q: Do they have a centralized in-processing, out-processing section here?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: How was it flying with the Marines?

A: They are a lot of gung-ho people, you know. I had never actually been around Marines until over there. I mean, we actually lived with them and everything. They are hard-charging all the time.

The pilot Marines and the ground Marines live in two separate worlds. I guess they don't like each other; you are either with this group of Marines, or you are not. You see a lot of them arguing with each other. It was a good experience.

Q: How was their reaction to having the Army with them?

A: If it was a good high-speed mission, they'd want to take it; but if it is like some whatever mission, "Give it to the MEDEVAC guys."

I guess they live in their own world. They've got a thing where they fly right over the top of you.

Q: How does that work?

A: Actually, they blew one of our Black Hawk doors off. They kind of want to fly around, and if they see a vehicle on the ground, try to dust them out. That was the biggest thing over there – sand dust blowing everywhere.

Q: Is this when you are on the ground and they come in over you?

Q: Yes. We have aircraft sitting on the ground, and they just pick up and take off over you, just trying to mess with us. They tore one of our doors off. I think it is still torn to this day, or they might be repairing it right now.

They kind of live in their own world. But it was a good experience. Lot of good guys, though. They are hard charging.

Q: Any unusual characters you ran into?

A: Not really. Just a lot of them are gung ho.

Q: How long have you been out of flight school?

A: I got here in 2001, so it's been a little bit over a year now, probably a year and a half.

Q: So you are pretty new to the game.

A: Yes, sir.

Q: How was flight school?

A: Flight school was a lot of studying. It is not just the flying portion, but just a lot of studying. Learning how to read the weather, learn about all the aircraft systems and how to file a flight plan and inspecting the aircraft – just a whole lot of different stuff. You're

part medic out there, learning how your ears, eyes and your whole body operate under those conditions. It's very competitive, too.

Q: Did everybody graduate in your platoon?

A: Yes, sir. Some don't at the same time, you know. You fall to the next class, and then some of them might get sent back a class behind you for academic reasons or personal reasons like a death in the family, but everybody graduates.

Q: Did you enjoy it?

A: Yes, sir. I had a lot of fun. You get to meet a lot of new personalities. I was over eleven years service at the time. Some of the other guys were brand new to the Army, or privates, and they were not used to all this coming at them at one time. You see some of them stressed out. I took it as my responsibility to kind of calm them down and help them out along the way.

Q: So you were the old man?

A: Yes.

Q: What was the hardest part for you?

A: Learning how to hover. Picking it up to hovering, that's like the hardest part of flying. We started off in a little TH-67 helicopter, the smallest helicopter, and the hard part is picking it up and learning the flight controls, to sit there and hover. If you can't get that, you really can't fly. That's the toughest part.

Q: Is it automatic when you fly now?

A: Yes, sir. It is just second nature now. Especially with the Black Hawks, they are such a strong little bird – pick it up and go without even thinking about it.

Q: Have you flown the Huey?

A: No, sir. Just straight Black Hawk.

Q: Is there a policy here where you would pick up some Huey time?

A: No, sir. We had a guy who they transitioned to Hueys because of the seat height. I had one pilot who went to the Sinai in Egypt for a year where he flew Hueys, but when he came back to the States, he would be flying Black Hawks. That was the aircraft he selected at the end.

Q: How is the Black Hawk? Is it a good helicopter?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: Any problems?

A: Just when the sand gets into them. They took a good beating over there. They got a lot of sand in them, so we were thoroughly cleaning them daily; get out there and check them and sweep sand out of them. Come in for a landing with the sand blowing, and it gets down inside the flight controls, grinding and everything.

Q: How was the flying over there?

A: Oh, the flying was great, especially when you go cross country, but you've constantly got to keep your head: got your medic over here, your crew chief over there and I'm keeping a look out. You've got people out there on the ground. Though a lot of them was waving at us, you just never can be too cautious. One of them might wait for you to fly back and take a shot at you. But for the most part, flying over the open terrain was pretty good flying. Except at nighttime, because none of their towers or wires, power lines, were lit up at night, so it is really scary.

We had one encounter when this Marine aircraft was coming in, but we didn't see him until we was about right there next to other aircraft. So we dipped this way and he dipped that way. Wow, he was right there. It was dark, pitch black and everybody was just quiet.

We hurried up and got back in. This was like a night mission, because my crew was on night shift. We had different shifts we pulled over there.

Q: Who was your medic and crew chief?

A: SGT Crump was my medic and SGT Rodriguez was my crew chief. My pilot was Mr. Barnett, David Barnett. He was an instructor pilot. He was the pilot-in-command and I was the co-pilot.

Q: How many hours does he have?

A: Over 1,000, maybe 2,000 hours flying. And I'm standing right at 350 or 400 hours right now.

Q: So you learned some flying there?

A: Yes, got a hundred combat hours over there. We did a lot of flying, saw a lot of casualties, here and there, with the Marines. They were the main effort going up towards the route we went up, so they saw a lot of action.

Q: I realize from these interviews that the Marines really had to claw their way up to Baghdad. They had a different experience than the 3d ID.

A: Yes, and our company covered all of the Marines. The 498th Medical Company covered the Marine Expeditionary Force. One company did that; it was broken out to three teams.

Q: What was the hardest part of your missions?

A: Just getting them back to back, constantly. They jumped every day or every other day, jumping and going forward to a new location. So we could be in the middle, coming back from a mission and find out that the support area on the ground had moved, and we would have to move with them.

Actually, they had two different DASCs – they call them Direct Air Support Centers. They had the forward DASC and the main DASC, and they would jump and pass each other. So if we are with this DASC right now, it is jumping forward.

Q: Leap frogging.

A: Leap frogging. Right. Our aircraft had to pick up and move when this one jumped forward. So it was like that all the way up to Baghdad. We were constantly moving. Those different headquarters would shut down operations, and soon as the other one set up, we would move up to it.

While this one is operating, we'd be picking up casualties. They'd give us the missions. "Hey, we've got a mission. You need to go pick up three casualties over in this location, and take them to the hospital." While we are doing that, the DASC is moving forward and as soon as they got set up there, the old one shut down and we'd have to move to the new one. That's how we operated. That was the hardest part. Sometimes they'd jump at nighttime. Whew, it was crazy, because there is nothing out there. No lit power lines. It was kind of scary at night.

The Marines started working with us. If it wasn't urgent casualties, they would hold them until sunrise, so that helped us out a lot. They understood it was real hectic flying at night. So unless the casualty was really hurt, or dying, or there was potential loss of eye or limb, or something like that, they would hold it off until the morning and then they would call us up on the radio and say, "Hey we've got a mission for you." So we appreciated that a lot.

Q: How about your crew? Do you think they were properly trained?

A: Yes. My crew chief and medic actually do all the work. I mean, I was the pilot, and all I would do is fly to the location. They had to get out with the casualties and take them from the aircraft to the ambulance. We had a real good crew. Awesome crew. They knew their job really well.

We might as well have had two medics back there, because the medic trained my crew chief on everything he needed to do. The crew chief knew everything medically to assist with the casualties. Sometimes we'd have four or five casualties in the back of the aircraft, and while we were flying, they were making sure the casualties are stable and no further injuries are caused to them.

Q: Where were you usually taking the casualties you picked up?

A: We would normally take them back to combat support hospitals. We would take them back to those hospitals identified for care.

Q: Were these Army or Navy?

A: They were all Naval, Navy slash Marine, because Marines don't have medics. The Navy was attached to them. Their medics are called Navy corpsmen. We asked them, "You a medic?" "No, I'm a Navy corpsman." They don't want you to call them medic. "I'm a Navy corpsman." That's what they call themselves. "Okay, Navy corpsman. I'm sorry."

We worked really good with those guys. Got to learn a lot about how they operate.

Q: Do you think you were prepared for your flying in Iraq?

A: Everything except the dust landings (call them brown out), because we don't get too much dust around here. Everyone was trained on how to land, because you can't just be messing around. Once you commit to the ground, you have to actually go ahead and land it, because if you get caught up in a brown out and you can't see, you can easily flip the aircraft over.

So everybody was pretty much trained up on that. We didn't lose any aircraft over there. Everybody knew how to land and take off. Don't mess around; if you are going to go ahead and take off, just go ahead and hurry up and get up. Because once the sand kicks up, you can't see outside. So everybody was pretty much trained up on that.

Q: That must be a lot of fun at night.

A: Yes, it is really crazy at night.

Q: During the change of the recording tape, Mr. Hill was describing some exciting experiences flying in Iraq.

A: Yes, that was one of my scariest. During that same night, on that same mission, we were real close to the power lines because they are not lit at night. As we were passing over them, Dave Barnett, the other pilot, said, "Did you see the power lines?" And I went, "No, I never saw it." Luckily at nighttime we are kind of briefed that we'll fly at least at 300 feet, and that keeps you at a safe distance above the tallest power line out there. We were already flying at a comfortable level and I still didn't see it. It's a good thing we were at that altitude. If we had been down lower, maybe 200 feet, you could easily crash into a power line, which I heard some other aircraft did over there.

After we'd drop the casualties off, we'd go down to a FARP where they've got fuel and resupply, to refuel. One night after we completed a mission, we flew to a FARP that they had briefed us was going to be open. We got down there low on fuel. But the FARP was shut down already, and we've got the number one fuel low light on, blinking. "Oh, man, what are we going to do?" And this is at night.

So we flew down there, "This is Dustoff C1 coming in for fuel." And they came back, "Dustoff C1 be advised that we have no fuel at this location." So we're like stuck right there.

But fortunately, the POL guys from my company were at that location and one of them recognized our aircraft. He just happened to have some fuel left in his HEMTT vehicle. and they told us to go ahead and land.

Well, we were already on the ground. We couldn't take off: when we tried to take off and leave, the number two fuel low light came on. So we were like, "Man, we can't go nowhere." We turned back around and sat down, and then they came out and they saw us. We shut down and got out. Man, we took pictures and everything. We hadn't seen those guys probably since the war started, because they went up way in advance, before we went up. They went up with the Marine guys.

Q: I understand they did a landslide business. They could have made some money, huh?

A: Yes.

Q: Because they had really been the refuelers for the Marines' aviation, hadn't they?

A: Yes, they were. They saved us that night. We sat out there, and it was on the verge of turning daylight. We took pictures with them, gave them food and stuff. They had been up there for a while. It was still cold, and I remember they've got scarves on. They filled us up with enough to get back to our location, and top off all the way from there. We were happy to see those guys.

I don't know whether we would have made it back otherwise. We would just have been sitting there. They would have had to drive another truck up there, and that was miles and miles away from where we were – from any other location. So they saved us that day, and they knew that we knew it. That was another good experience.

Q: How about the casualty collection business? Any memorable events?

A: Just when we'd pick up Iraqi casualties; we were picking up those guys too.

Q: EPWs?

A: EPWs, right.

Q: How about the routine missions? What would a normal day be like?

A: In the beginning, a day shift would normally start at 0600 in the morning until maybe 1500 that day. Those guys were getting the bulk of the missions, because that's when I guess a lot of the casualties were occurring. So they'd come in, drop off casualties, pick up another four or five and take them out. They'd get another mission while they were still in the air, so they'd be gone the whole time.

On one day they might pick up ten or fifteen casualties. It is a long day, like up to ten hours in the block period that they are scheduled to be on, but during the nighttime it kind of slowed down. I was usually on that shift. I got close to 200 combat hours during that operation, flying constantly.

Q And that's only about a 30-day period?

A: Yes sir. A lot of flying took place in a short period of time.

Q: How about the equipment you had?

A: We had our [NVG] goggles. We had to depend on them for those night missions. We didn't really have weapons. We are considered noncombatant, so we had our M-9 pistols, except for the crew chief; he had an M-16. Other than that: the litter pans [mounted on the carousel], medical equipment, and the crew chief had all his necessary tools.

Eventually, when it slowed down a little bit, the crews from the rear who were still way down south in Kuwait were bringing us mail, care packages, goodies, and stuff like that to keep us going – water supply, food supply, things like that. That was working pretty good for us.

Q: And your mail was getting through?

A: Yes, sir. They were always bringing up our mail, and we were writing mail. When they'd come up we would give them letters to send back down south, to send off for us. That was working out a little bit, too. It really wasn't that bad.

Q: How was the morale?

A: The morale was kind of bad initially. We were supposed to change our crews, to keep a fresh crew up there, but when it first started we had guys that were really getting burned out – just a steady, fast pace the whole time. But those crews down south weren't coming up and replacing us; bring a crew up maybe like three days then rotate another crew up. That wasn't happening, so guys were starting to get a little frustrated by that.

But after awhile, we just stuck with it, and said, "Hey, let's go ahead and do it." We saw we were not going to be refreshed or reset, so it is on us, and we just had to bear down and stick it out, until at the very end, when the crews in the rear back down south in Kuwait started coming up and rotating. Things had slowed down by then.

Then it came to a point where we really didn't want to go back. We had pushed this far, "Now I'm going all the way." We got the attitude, "I'm going all the way to Baghdad. Ain't nobody replacing me now."

Q: Did you all end up in Baghdad?

A: Yes, sir. We went all the way up, and the closer we got to it, "No I am not turning back now." No one wanted to go back down to Kuwait the closer we got to Baghdad. And then when we did get up there, the whole company came forward anyway for about two days, I guess just so they could say, "Hey, we went to Baghdad, too." After that, everybody trickled back down to Kuwait.

Q: They wanted to get a T-shirt.

A: It was crazy.

Q: How was the climate around Baghdad? Did you get many missions there?

A: Yes, sir. We got plenty of missions while we were up in Baghdad. There was still a little resistance there. One LZ we landed at was hot; one of our guys took a gunshot wound to the abdomen, and we could actually hear him screaming in the back of the helicopter. I'd never heard that before. If we can hear them from the front, then he is loud. When we were coming in for the landing, he was screaming loud. When we picked him up, it was kind of hot around there, because I glanced around and you can see all the Marines laying down in a prone position in the perimeter. I guess they just had a little firefight.

He was kind of stable, but we took off real fast because he was bleeding. I glanced back and I saw blood trickling. When we got to the hospital – you know, fast, got to get him in – he started screaming on the descent, coming down. That's when he just screamed, "Owwwww."

Q: When you're talking to your grandkids years from now, what will you say was your greatest contribution?

A: We had to evacuate a lot of casualties. I remember my very first one, like man, this is what it is all about right here, saving lives. We've actually got casualties back there that are depending on me to get them to safety, get them to the hospital and save their lives. That's what I was thinking about the entire time.

Q: You came in as an infantryman, so you've seen this from both sides.

A: Yes.

Q: How much of this registers with the average grunt?

A: Well, the grunts are like, "There they go again," when they are dropped off in the rear. I didn't really appreciate the Dustoff crews that much. They did sometimes keep us from walking so far, when they'd come pick us up. But when they dropped us off, it was, "There they go again." But now, like you said, I've seen it from both sides. The grunts on the ground depend on us to be there for them.

Q: Were you getting any pressure from the Marines for non-MEDEVAC runs?

A: Yes, because they would come out to our aircraft and say, "Can we get a ride?" If we were not doing down time, sometimes we had room and we'd take them on a mission with us, if it was just a routine transfer. Or sometimes Marines that had gone on emergency leave or something like that would come out and ask us if we could take them from point A to point B. Especially, if we're not on night duty time we'll pick them up. And they appreciate it. They come up to our aircraft, "Hey, can I get a ride?" We had a real good crew, and we didn't mind taking them up, let them take pictures and stuff.

Q: Did you give them frequent flier miles?

A: [Laughter]

Q: What do you think are some lessons learned, for yourself or the Army?

A: Pretty much trying to stay together as a team, and don't try to be an individual over there. Everybody has to depend on someone else. Don't try to outshine the next person

because you may need that person one day, and vice versa, he may need you. That's a good lesson learned.

Just try to be prepared and prepare yourself, as well as preparing others. Me being a war veteran from before, I just kind of helped guys, let them know essential items you are going to need being over there. Try not to waste things, especially MREs. You never know when you are going to get another resupply, so try not to waste.

As far as taking showers and stuff, that was my biggest thing. Make sure you pack enough baby wipes. Even before we left here, baby wipes, baby wipes, baby wipes, because I knew what it would be like. I had a big old footlocker full of them. Matter of fact, I brought a lot of it home, because I didn't expect to come home that fast. I packed like we was going to be over there for a year. So I have a lot of that stuff still at the house, still in the box. Before long, a lot of wives started sending a lot of baby wipes and stuff to all the guys. So yes, you need that stuff. Good learning experience for a lot of guys.

Q: Where were you in Desert Storm, and what were you doing?

A: I was in the 3d Brigade, 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry, "Rakkasans Lead the Way" [101st Airborne Division (Air Assault)]. When we first went in, our mission was to go to an oil pumping station, right along the Euphrates River. We captured and held that. By the time we got in, we could hear on the radio, "There's been a cease-fire." But we could not understand the cease-fire part. We went in there, and it was over so fast.

The walk to the pumping station was rough, because they dropped us off about a click out, a thousand meters, way out with hundred pound rucksacks and knee deep in mud, because it was raining that night. It was early morning, maybe about four or five because it was still dark. But the Iraqis had fled. I was on the initial assault. There was 98 aircraft in the air at one time when we landed.

One of the lead ambulances got in a little fire fight, but the Iraqis withdrew right out of there. So there really wasn't no resistance. That turned out to be short and sweet.

Q: And what followed that?

A: Well, we stayed at that pump station until the war was over with. We stayed there for maybe another week or so until we got on back down to Saudi.

Q: Did you find any of your experience of being an infantryman has been particularly valuable to you now that you are a pilot?

A: Yes. Especially my mentality, you know, not being over- stressed out. I always thought about those guys out there living in foxholes. That just made me feel more appreciative.

We'd get to stay in our aircraft, so I know my stress level wasn't near as high as some of those guys out there on the front line. I know what they were going through. I've been there, living out in the middle of the desert in a foxhole. No protection around you, just you and your weapon, and your buddy to your left and your right.

Q: That's it. Well, anything else you want to talk about?

A: No, sir. I just enjoyed trying to encourage the younger soldiers. It was their first time away from home, and a lot of them would come to guys that's been around for a while. I'd just try to encourage them. I wrote them a letter when they were still down in Kuwait, and I sent the letter with one of the other guys that was going back. I said, "Read this to the fellows back down there. Let them know that everything is all right and it ain't so bad." When I got back, I heard, "Mr. Hill, we got your letter. Appreciate it."

Other than that, you know, we just try to keep everybody happy and upbeat. That was pretty much it.

Q: Welcome home.

A: Thank you, sir.

Q: And thank you very much.

A: All right.

AMEDD ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM
INTERVIEW OIF 063

INTERVIEW WITH
CW2 JASON K. WRIGHT
498TH MEDICAL COMPANY (AIR AMBULANCE)

CONDUCTED BY
COL RICHARD VAN NESS GINN, USA, RET.
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA
19 AUGUST 2003

OFFICE OF MEDICAL HISTORY
OFFICE OF THE SURGEON GENERAL, U.S. ARMY/
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. ARMY MEDICAL COMMAND
FALLS CHURCH, VIRGINIA

Q: Mr. Wright, a little bit about your background, where you are from, where you went to school and your family.

A: I am from Minneapolis, Minnesota. I grew up there, entered the Army there, and I've been in about fourteen years. I was a cavalry scout, enlisted 19D, and I went through Desert Storm.

Q: Did you graduate high school in Minneapolis?

A: Yes. Blaine High School, Minneapolis.

Q: Did you do any college or go straight in the Army?

A: Right into the Army.

Q: Why did you join the Army?

A: I didn't have any money for college at the time, and my family didn't have any money. That was the end of '89, so I went in the Army. My dad was in the Army in Vietnam and my Grandpa was in World War II. Originally, I was going to join the Air Force, but I just ended up joining the Army.

Q: Where did your dad serve?

A: He was with the 1st Air Cav Division. He was drafted, and they made him a POW interrogator, like in the MI. That is what he did in the 1st Air Cav, I think the 1-7 and 1-9 [1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry and 1st Battalion, 9th Cavalry].

Q: How about your Grandad? Where was he?

A: He was with the 101st when they started out prior to World War II, as they were creating the unit in Camp Clairborne, Louisiana, kind of like you see in the shows and, of course, the newer *Band of Brothers* – how they went to England to gear up for the war.

Q: Did you watch *Band of Brothers*?

A: Yeah, that was really good. That was really neat.

Q: My son, who is an MP in the 2d Infantry Division, has that film. We're going to see it together.

A: Well, I rented it the first month it was out in the stores. I rented the first DVD; I think each one has two episodes on it. I took it home and watched it, and had to go back and

just keep renting them until I finished it within a matter of days, because it was that good. It was really pretty neat.

Q: People say it is great. Well, how come you wanted to get into flying?

A: I don't know where it ever got into me, but I always wanted to do it since I was maybe ten or eleven. I wanted to be a military pilot of some kind. Of course, you always think of Air Force fighter pilots and things like that.

I was really into the World War II pilots when I was growing up, like bomber pilots and the whole 8th Air Force during World War II. I did a lot of research into that. It was just one of my interests. I wanted to be a military pilot. Whoever or wherever it would take me.

Q: Would you settle for a P-51? Would that be OK?

A: Oh yeah, that would be really nice. So I was going to go into the Air Force. I figured at that time if you don't go through the Academy, you are probably not going to get a flight slot. That wasn't going to happen, but I said, "Well, I'm going to go in the Air Force. If I can't fly them, at least I can be around them."

Q: Well, you know the Air Force had NCO pilots in World War II.

A: Yes.

Q: They don't want to admit that.

A: Yes. I thought, well, I could be around them, you know. So I was going to do that. A friend and I went to the recruiter offices together at the same strip mall. I went to the Air Force recruiter. I was in there about five minutes, and he's like, "Here's some literature." That was about it. I was like, "Well, OK." Then I went to pick up my friend, because he was at the Army recruiter.

I went there and was waiting for him. Of course, the recruiter started talking. "What are you doing?" I said, "Oh, waiting for my friend." And he said, "Well, I'm not saying that you will fly someday in the Army, but you have a better chance of probably doing it." They told me about the whole warrant officer program. So, that's how I ended up getting interested in that and ended up joining the Army. And I guess it ended up coming true.

Q: I guess it did. How was flight school?

A: It was fun. It was a challenge to fly a helicopter. I think it is a hell of a lot harder to fly a helicopter than it is to fly a plane, because it doesn't want to fly. If you let go of the controls, it is not going to fly. It is going to go into the ground. Where with the plane, as

long as you get it some forward air speed and you have your wind going over your wings, the thing is going to want to fly.

So I learned to fly a helicopter, and it was fun. You meet some people that you wonder if they are going to get through it. But they do a good enough job in Army aviation, if you pay attention. They are going to start you from ground zero. If you listen and pay attention, and you do what you are supposed to, you will end up being a good helicopter pilot. So they take you from nothing, to flying helicopters pretty good in the matter of a year, year and a half, something like that.

Q: Were you flying Dustoff before this assignment?

A: No. I was flying, I guess you call it, General Support or air assault type stuff, over in Germany with the 1st Armoured Division.

Q: Black Hawk?

A: Black Hawks, yes.

Q: Are you married?

A: Yeah. Married and have one child, two years old, and one more on the way.

Q: How did it go for your family during the deployment? You've been through deployments before.

A: Yes, so it wasn't that bad, other than it is a full fledged war this time, and pretty dangerous. I was in Desert Storm, but that was at the very beginning of my career, so I guess we really didn't know any different. I had just gotten married, and I was gone about nine months for that.

Then you do the Bosnias, the Kosovos. I did all of those when I was in Europe, but those aren't as dangerous. Flying is inherently dangerous, but that usually never scares me, the flying portion of it. But, throw in there people shooting at you, that does.

So as far as the deployments and being separated, you know it is going to be bad just in the fact that you are separated. But we get through it. It wasn't that bad. Other than the things about it being an invasion, about the whole war, and then you don't know, or they don't know on this end whether you are alive every day.

Q: How was the family support for your wife and kiddy while you were gone?

A: Really good, as good as it can be, I guess. I don't have any specific examples. But from past deployments, say when we were in Germany, they always have some family support group, things like that.

There's always those people (a microcosm of society) that want to complain about everything. Some people are always complaining that they (society) never do enough for them. But I think there is a lot more offered than they give them credit for, they being maybe the commander's wife, or Army community service, or other things to comfort the family or assist them while the soldier is gone. No civilian company does that. They could give a damn what your family is doing when you are off at work.

Q: Oh, yes.

A: But there's always those people that will complain and say they never do enough for them. I think the Army actually does quite a bit. They always kept them informed, and that's a big piece of it right there.

Q: What are the similarities or differences of flying with a Dustoff unit versus your other aviation experiences?

A: I actually kind of enjoy the Dustoff role, the air ambulance role. I want to say it is an individual thing, but you are still working as a team. It is not the big air assault exercises where you have eight ships and they've got to do this gnat's ass planning three days prior for every little mission, right down to the most minute detail, this Fort Campbell air assault thing.

Q: What kind of planning?

A: You know, you will have a knee board packet of information [map sheets, etc., sized to fit on the pilot's knee for ready reference]. It's just an over-abundance of stuff. They try to plan everything down to the littlest detail. And when one thing doesn't go as planned, the whole thing doesn't work, because it is planned so tightly that people don't even want to think on their own.

Sometimes we did those exercises over and over again. Or you focus on stuff like inserting troops, picking up troops, which can be fun at times. But I enjoy the air ambulance; you don't know what's going to happen. You know you have to go out there and pick up people. You have to pick up wounded people, sick people, civilians, military, otherwise, but you don't know where it is going to happen and you don't know when it is going to happen. It is going to happen all the time, so you just hit it and go. You just go to that place, and pick them up. The only thing you really have to know is where can I get fuel, or where is the hospital?

I guess I like that kind of reacting in a hurry, planning as you go into it. You are going to have to know where to re-fuel and other battlefield planning stuff like that. But you don't know anything about your individual mission until it happens, other than you are going to have to go pick somebody up. Then fifteen minutes later, five minutes later, you are there to get them.

Q: I take it you really didn't have much in the way of ROE or restrictions of what you could do in terms of your flying. In other words, you weren't restricted from night flying, and you weren't restricted from flying single ship.

A: Well, we had altitude rules.

Q: But flying single ship?

A: Oh, no.

Q: No one was saying, "No night missions." No one was saying, "No hot areas." It was still your call.

A: Right. It was our call, as long as we maintained 500 feet miniumu.

Q: You didn't have to stand back and wait for a gunship unless you knew there was somebody readily available.

A: Right. And that was probably not going to happen, because they are all tied up doing other things. I very rarely had an escort. I don't think I ever had one.

Q: How was that compared with other Dustoff units in Iraq?

A: We pretty much stayed in the Marine sector, so that was all we really knew. It was actually a divided sector to keep people out of each other's area of operations. That's how they divide up the battlefield, with phase lines and sectors. You had the Army, which was primarily 3d ID over here to the west and southwestern section [points to map].

Q: The Marine area of operations was pretty much this, wasn't it?

A: Yes. It was north right up through the Safwan area, while 3d ID and the Army units went pretty much to the west, and were unopposed. That was planned that way; they pretty much briefed that beforehand, and that was the way it went. There was really nothing out here to the southwest heading to the northwest, or southeast heading to the northwest, and they went pretty much unopposed for quite a while.

We went up through Safwan and Al Basrah. The Brits were also with us, and they stopped at Basrah and held that area. The 1st Marine Division [of the I MEF] pretty much came up along and hit Jalibah, and took that area. They sent some units up through these towns – I can't even pronounce them – the eastern ones close to the Iranian border. But not as much as they sent towards An Nasiriyah.

The Marine AO butts up right against the Army sector there at An Nasiriyah. So when you hear of the Army getting involved in the An Nasiriyah area, that's why, because is kind of a junction point of both sectors.

Then after that there was Route One – that's actually what I guess Iraq calls it, too. There is a Highway One and a Highway Seven. Highway Seven runs north out of An Nasiriyah right up next to the Tigris River, towards Al Kut north. Route One runs towards Al Hillah-Babylon and that area. That's where they focused primarily, and all those little towns going up that road. They hit a lot of resistance that they didn't plan for.

Q: So the Marines were centered on Route Seven to the east?

A: On that and on Route One. They had this whole area up to Ad Diwaniyah, out to there. That's probably where the Army sector started to come in.

Q: So 3d ID was really –

A: Yes, pretty much unopposed out here until Karbala and that area. In most of it, they didn't really run into anything. But the Marines hit every one of these little towns going north out of An Nasiriyah. There's all these little towns they hit all the way to Al Kut, and they hit quite a bit of resistance.

We picked up a lot of wounded and dying and dead Marines from each one of those skirmishes. In fact, we even had to stop the battle. They said this was going to take nine days from the time we crossed the border until we secured Baghdad. Well, in nine days we were probably stopped short of Al Kut, and, of course, you've got this whole area between these two routes, too. Most of the regimental combat teams the Marines had within their division were centered along Route Seven and Route One. There's pretty much nothing in between those two routes. It is pretty much a vast wasteland with Bedouins and stuff like that, so you can cover that with aircraft. There isn't too much out there.

From there they went through Al Kut and continued up that route towards Baghdad. I believe that's still Route Seven. Route One comes up over this way, but at Al Hillah, which is the Babylon area, it goes into the south of Baghdad, and starts getting into the Army sector. So the Marines pushed up Route One and came back up this road. I'm not sure what it is, but it goes back to the northeast towards Al Kut where they were going to meet up with the joint forces that were heading up Route Seven here to Al Kut. The

Marines joined up there, and followed this road (I think it is still Route Seven) that parallels the Tigris River and enters Baghdad from the southeast. That's where they joined up. And that's where a Marine regimental combat commander got relieved.

Q: Right here at Al Kut.

A: He wasn't going fast enough to be joined up, and that's where it happened.

Q: I remember seeing that in the paper. They didn't give a reason, but it was pretty obvious.

A: It was because he was too slow in getting up here to meet these forces. He was taking too long. So the Marine general just said, "You're out," and sent somebody else.

Q: That was fast.

A: Yes. When those two forces were joining up, he wasn't joining up as fast as he should. They were supposed to meet him up here where they were doing all this river crossing. I can't remember how many regimental combat teams, but they were pretty much divided half and half for the whole Marine division. There wasn't much resistance out here to the east, toward the Iranian border, but that's where he got relieved.

Q: How was it being with the Marines?

A: It was different. You had to learn things. They do things differently. They have different lingo, and a lot of different stuff as far as aviation goes, as far as talking on the radio. Words that they use are a lot different, obviously more Navy type terms. You just get used to it.

Some of them kind of shun you, pilot wise, especially because we have warrant officer pilots. They don't have anything like that. They are all captains, majors, colonels, and lieutenant colonels. Most of them are all right, but some of them didn't really want to work with you.

Their primary aircraft, helicopter wise, that they were using to assist the troops, is a cargo-type helicopter, the CH-46. It's like the Chinook CH-47, a Boeing with a dual tandem rotor system, but it is an older, smaller version. They call it a frog because if you look at it from above, it looks like a frog. It sits high in the front and low in the back and it has two wheels sticking out on the sides like two legs, looking back at it.

So they have 46s. They had CH-53s, the big ones, hauling big stuff, big fuel bladders, heavy stuff. That's a big helicopter. But they are not doing so much troop insertion in close, because every time you land out here it is a task just to land because of the dust and dirt that you kick up. I mean, every landing that you do, every take off. It's not as simple as just doing it in the grass or on pavement. It is just difficult every time you go to land.

If you've never been to that particular landing spot before, you wonder, is it really dusty? Because some of them are extremely dusty, and you will absolutely brownout and crash. There's a lot of people who are crashing, and you think, "Geez, this isn't the way I want to go."

Q: But your altimeter gives you your altitude.

A: It's only accurate within plus or minus seventy feet or so.

Q: What's causing the problem?

A: Well, you brownout and you don't have a visual reference any more. It is all happening really fast in a matter of a few seconds. If you don't estimate the situation in a few seconds as you're browning out, it's going to be the difference whether you land normally, belly down, or tip over. You have no idea that you've done that, and you crash. Or you hit too hard or too fast, because you just can't come in and hover. You have to come in with a forward speed to keep the dust down, because it is already going to start building up. You are going to be 100 feet off the ground and your rotor wash is already kicking up enough dust below you so that it is already building down there.

Q: Is part of the problem shifting from visual flight to instruments at that point?

A: Right. You don't want to be on instruments when you are close to the ground. Nobody does that. Airline pilots don't even do that. At some point they transition to visual, usually right when they are landing; they don't ever land in zero-zero. If it gets to be zero-zero, people don't get out of the airport. The pilots have to be able to see at least 100 feet or something like that. You can ride instruments all the way down to a certain point, but you've got to be able to see to land. To a point you can kind of get away with it, cheat it a little bit. But just because you got in that situation and you got lucky and got out of it, it's not practiced.

There's a few times that I've browned out. You think, "What am I going to do, go around? Is it going to get that bad? I can barely, barely, barely see." Now you are checking your instruments, because it's all happening within a matter half seconds. You are going, "Okay, what's my altitude, what's my artificial horizon, are we still level?" Because we don't want to hit like this, [demonstrates] and, "How fast are we going?"

Q: You were describing how hairy it is to land in a dusty situation.

A: Every time was a dice roll, because it's just that dust and dirt, and it is different everywhere you're landing. It may be just granular sand that you can see through, but it is still dusty and a hell of a mess. It really kicks up a hell of a dust cloud down at the

bottom, and the sand blasts the guys that you are landing around. But you can still see through it. Those are the ones you like because you can see through those.

It is those other ones, just like pumice, that just as soon as you come down, it engulfs you. And we're even coming down with forward speed, we're not even talking about hovering; there's no place you can even hover. I mean you are at 100 feet, and you are already kicking up a dust cloud down there that's starting to build. So you've got to come in with forward speed. You've got to try and estimate the situation real fast. "How fast shall I come in to beat that dust ball that's going to be building at my tail?", so that I time it just right so when it engulfs the cockpit, I'm putting it down.

You've got the rear crew members helping out by going, "Okay, dust ball is building at the tail. It is coming up towards the cargo door." The faster they are saying it, you can kind of visualize how fast this thing is coming up. From experience you are thinking, "Is this one of those that is really going to come up?"

So, if I'm not really close to the ground right now, I'm going to probably have to pull the power and do a go-around, because this thing is going to engulf me. If I've still got ten feet to go, at that point, if you're not on the ground or just putting it down, you might as well call it off, pull in power and go around and try it again.

Q: While we were changing the tape, Mr. Wright was further explaining how a pilot must have visual contact with the ground to land. You just can't ride the instruments all the way in.

A: Your brain is relying 80 percent on visual input. That's what they teach us in aeromedical class, that 80 percent of what what's going on is visual. So when you are flying instruments, such as in the clouds, you know you are flying without vision, like airline pilots or pilots that are instrument rated do every day in the clouds. There's things that you've got to tell yourself that you're trained to do: to trust your instruments. Because without that visual reference, you cannot rely on the-seat-of-your pants flying with proprioceptive feedback, because your body will trick you. You can get yourself into situations where you think, for instance, that you are in a turn, call it the leans. Or the Coriolis effect where you think you're in a spin, and you're really not.

Q: Proprioceptive?

A: Yeah, that's the seat of your pants. That's like you can feel yourself sitting on the chair, and leaning one way or the other if somebody tilts it. It's like pressure on the different muscles of your body.

Q: Coriolis effect?

A: Is doing with the ears.

Q: And who said flying was easy, right?

A: Right. So when you take your vision away as a pilot – you hear about pilots crashing all the time; most likely civilian, for instance, JFK, Jr. They say he went into the clouds that night. They figure he didn't have his instrument rating or training, and maybe was not aware of those situations that can come about. If he is not trained to fly instruments, then he can get himself in a deadly situation where all of a sudden he is flying upside down. Or the plane is diving and he doesn't even realize it, because he doesn't know how to interpret the instruments.

You hear about people crashing like that, when they don't have an instrument rating but got themselves into an instrument weather situation, such as going into the clouds, or sometimes even at night. Just lack of contrast and lack of ground lights can get you into a non-visual situation.

Q: Well, he was over water.

A: Yeah, and over water is a bad one, too. Every time I've flown over water of a vast size, such as an ocean or a bay, there is no contrast. Even in the daytime you've got blue on blue. I mean, you have pretty much blue water and a horizon and a blue sky, and it all kind of starts blending together. You'll start having to kind of shake your head a little bit and check your instruments.

I usually just transition to the instruments, even though we are flying visually on a sunny day, because, you can get yourself visually screwed up by not having any contrast out there. With a lot of things flying at night, over water for instance (going back to the example of JFK, Jr.), the confusion with ground lights and stars is another illusion that people can get into. If you are aware of these illusions, you probably won't get into them, because you will say, "Wait, let me recheck that." But if a pilot is not aware of them, those illusions can easily overtake him, such as confusion with the ground lights of a city, or the white lights of a dark city with the starlit sky, when he thinks the ground is the starlight.

If he is really going into a dive the whole time when he's confused the ground lights with starlight, his instruments will tell him he's in a dive (if his plane is equipped with them). Hopefully he confused it the other way and is actually climbing, but usually it doesn't happen that way, and he thinks, "Well, I'm going to climb, because I'm thinking the ground lights are the stars." But really he is in a dive the whole time until he slams it into the ground.

Q: So you are flying in the dust in Iraq, and to make it more interesting, you do that at night, too.

A: Oh yeah, that's horrible. It's horrible under goggles. If you fly with night vision goggles, you think that is kind of weird, and it is. It is different. But once you fly with them, you wouldn't want to fly without them. You can take the goggles off and go, "Okay, now go fly into that LZ."

Of course, we do a lot more things now with the goggles than they ever would have in, say, Vietnam, or up until they had night vision goggles. I mean, they wouldn't go into a tight LZ with no landing light on. Now we don't turn our landing light on; we don't need it because we have the goggles.

But I don't think they flew too much in Vietnam at night, because they didn't have those capabilities. You are just not going to go into a tight jungle LZ.

Q: Well, they had moonlight.

A: Yeah.

Q: And some guy on the ground would have a flashlight to mark the LZ.

A: Yes, they would have to rely on something like that. That would be horrible.

Q: There might be a little signal fire, or a flashlight. They flew a lot at night.

A: ...and clip trees or wires or something like that.

Q: But they weren't dealing with dust storms.

A: No. So I couldn't imagine doing it. In Iraq at night, sometimes you'd get patients and go back towards the combat support hospital they call LZ Viper in the Marine sector, down by Jalibah. There was a big airfield there, an old Iraqi airfield, an airstrip they cleaned off and were starting to use. Then they built up around it. Other than that, there's nothing out there, just desert and power lines everywhere, and the river. They put a combat support hospital there about halfway through the ground war, because up to that point we were flying people all the way back to Kuwait and were running out of fuel. We can't make it because we have to go all the way back and then go all the way back up. Plus, the ground forces are moving. We moved real rapidly within the first four days – starting from March 18th or 19th – through Basrah and all the way up to An Nasiriyah.

From that point, we are flying people all the way back to Kuwait, and then all the way back up, but it wasn't just a straight shot. It required a lot of fuel, and they were starting to move the fuel points further north to keep up with the movement going north. So, we were telling them, "Hey, you need to move a hospital or some of these medical support units closer to the front, because pretty soon we are going to be up here in the middle of Iraq, almost to Baghdad, and there's going to be nowhere to fly these guys." I mean, it is

nice to have critical care and air ambulance stuff, but if you don't have anything close, it defeats the purpose if I've got to fly the guy two hours to the rear – and that's flying at 145 knots, you know.

So they finally moved a combat support hospital up there, and built it up with Navy doctors and Navy corpsmen. The Marines don't have any medics. That's another thing I found out about the Marines. They don't have any medics and they don't have any doctors. They rely on the Navy to provide all that. We'd fly the patients back there while they built up this tent city thing. Of course, now that the supposed war is further north, the medics feel more comfortable about it. Plus there was not a whole lot of Iraqi forces out there.

There was a lot of white light at LZ Viper. It got to a point that we'd have to flip up the goggles to land at their LZ. We'd flip up the goggles and turn on the landing light because it was so washed out with bright light. Then you start kicking up sand in the dirt landing or dust landing at night, and it is reflected under goggles. Sometimes you get lucky. In some places it is a little bit easier under goggles, and you think, "Well, geez, I went in there last night under goggles, so it can't be too bad going in there during the day." You figure, "Hey, it was easier under goggles, because you actually could see through some of that stuff."

But in the daytime, you got engulfed a heck of a lot quicker, because you couldn't see through the dust cloud. As long as you can get some kind of contrast, you can see through it, but it's like a blur, seeing through it. When we say we're blacked out, I mean, we are completely engulfed and you can't see anything, not even out the chin bubble.

I transition to visual as soon as it starts engulfing me. I am just looking for a little contrast with the ground so I can relate where I'm at. It is all real fast. I worked my way looking for the ground all the way back to the aircraft, right up close to it, because that is going to be the last place. If I can't get it on the ground, then it is go-around time. If I get down to one to two feet, I can slam it down.

But you don't want to be getting in the habit of just slamming it down any higher than that, because eventually you are going to get used to doing that. You are going to try that from five, six, seven, ten feet, and in that short amount of time, if you come down sideways all bets are off.

The Black Hawk is designed to land on its belly and all three struts. If you can do that, you can survive one heck of a crash landing, so they say. It is designed to hit hard that way. It may damage the aircraft, but everybody will be all right. But if you land any other way, on the nose, on the tail, on the side, all bets are off. That thing will crush like a pop can. So, that's why you always want to get it down on the belly, on all three wheels. You do that, and you are probably going to survive and the aircraft is probably going to be all right too.

Q: You guys were moving pretty fast. What was your pace of operations, your OPTEMPO?

A: Let's see. I ended up flying, in the first 20 days, maybe 120 hours. Those were a lot of hours, you know. We would get in the aircraft, and since we hot refueled, we never shut the aircraft down. We never got out. It means we pulled into the gas pump, hooked up, pumped it full of fuel while we are running, then going again. We'd go for seven, eight, nine, ten hours a day straight, and we'd just be exhausted. We'd go back to our base, which was always at Marine division headquarters, to wherever they were jumping. We jumped every day, and we'd land there and go to sleep. Sleep right in the helicopter, back in the little litter pans [of the carousel] in the aircraft, kind of like bunk beds back there. Not very comfortable, but we'd sleep back there and get up the next morning. We changed shifts quite a bit, but for the most part my crew would come on at six or seven in the morning, and then be on until about six or seven at night. Something like that. Sometimes longer. Just depended on the OPTEMPO.

Something else would come up and the other crews were also tied up, but you're still involved in picking up people on Route Michigan in Baghdad, so it was just nonstop all day long. You're constantly picking people up, going back to a shock trauma platoon where they stabilized them, and then pick them up again (or somebody else will,) to take them further back, maybe to a hospital if they need surgery or something like that – to a forward surgical hospital or something.

The Marines relied completely on our air ambulances or other helicopters, because they really didn't do any kind of EVAC by ground. I don't know what they did in the Army sector, but over in the Marine sector, all the wounded are EVAC'd by air, all of them, every single one of them, by either a Marine CH-46 or Army UH-60A MEDEVAC**.**

Sometimes later on in the war, maybe we could get them on a C-130. The Marine C-130s would land at some of the field strips they would build close to where those combat support hospitals were. There was one at Jalibah and there's one by Al Kut. They would consolidate the patients there, and fly them back to Kuwait, maybe 50 people with wounds of various types. They could get them all back there in like an hour, no problem.

We also had people from our company running from Kuwait northbound up to here and taking them back to Kuwait. We had a support team back there at Ali Al Salem Airbase in Kuwait that would run forward up to places that we would take patients to, say Jalibah and that area (referred to as LZ Viper), and run them back to Kuwait. Then when they got them back to Kuwait, sometimes fly them out to the [USNS] *Comfort*, or to some other hospitals in Kuwait that they had set up.

We dealt primarily with Marines and sailors in that sector. We would get a few soldiers, because there was the Army's 86th Combat Support Hospital, also at Jalibah. They said

that was kind of like a border right on the two sectors [Army and Marine] where they came together.

So there was a heavy Army and Marine mix in that area, The 86th CSH was sitting right next to the Navy forward surgical hospital, the one they referred to as LZ Viper. So you could take patients to either one; they didn't discriminate one way or the other. It was just who offered what services, who had what doctor, depending on what the person needed.

Q: What was your most memorable mission?

A: Well, let's see. We had a couple of them actually, but there was one in the early days of the war where we picked up seven patients. We could only carry four litters, because we have a four-litter set-up back there, plus my crew chief and medic seats. Then you have other crap packed in there – medical supplies and stuff.

We had gotten a call to go pick up two patients at one location and one at another location; they were all litter urgent. This was somewhere up Route One, probably northwest of An Nasiriyah. There were really no towns along there. There were convoys like crazy and the Marine advance going up those routes. We were flying back and forth along that road, because if something ever happened, at least you are close to it. There was nothing on either side of it. We'd go until fuel was critical, and then we'd cut it short, kind of run off the route a little bit. We were pretty much free to go wherever we wanted to out there.

Well, as I said, I had run up that route to pick up two at one location and one in another location. I think it was a mix of enemy and Iraqi soldiers and U.S. Marines. Usually it was that way when you got a call, because there would be some battle or some skirmish, and there was always a mix of both. So we'd haul them both on the same run. The casualties were pretty much out of it anyway, as far as being a threat in the aircraft. So I had three patients.

Anyway, a Marine on the ground somewhere on that route was smart enough to know that we came overhead. He came over relatively loud, which meant I knew that he had to be transmitting real close to me. We were hauling butt down the road, going about 145 knots and something came over the radio, like "Army MEDEVAC," or "Army Dustoff UH-60, this is so and so on the ground."

I said, what the heck was that? . . . So I said "This is. . ." you know, whatever our call sign was that day . . . He said, "Yeah, you just flew over my location. I have some wounded down here."

We already had three on board. So I whipped it around and went back up the road. I said, "Well, just pop smoke or do something," so they said, "Yeah I'm throwing some

smoke out." We landed, and he wanted us to take two more. I said, "Yeah, I've got room for two. Bring them over." So we now had four on litters, and our medic was working on them.

We were still sitting on the ground when they called back on the radio and said, "Have you got room for two more?" We were up to five total now, so I'm thinking, "Yeah, we've got room for two more," because we've got one guy sitting on the floor. My medic said, "Hey, you can put him in my seat. I'll just stand up," because he was going to be working on them anyway. It was kind of cramped in there.

Then he said again, "Do you have room for two more?" I asked the medic in the back and he said, "Yeah, we can put one in my crew chief's seat, Wheeler's seat." I called back and asked, "Are they litters?" "Yeah, they're litters." I said, "Well, if you can make them not litters, they can come, because I don't have room for another litter." I had four litters in there already. So they walked the patients over. I don't remember what was wrong with them. We put one in each one of the crew chief's and the medic's seats, and one on the floor, that's three; plus four litters, so that's seven. The medic and crew chief stood hunched over in there, and away we went. That was early on, probably in the first six days of the war.

We had some other memorable missions, because we were always alone. We were never escorted. Marines always flew two ships everywhere they went, sometimes three, with .50-cals sticking out the side, mini guns, everything, but we have no weapons, other than our 9-millimeter personal protection pistol.

We are a single ship running up that Route One again, and getting close to that Al Hillah. I remember it was up towards that area. We got a call, "You've got to pick up this wounded guy, urgent." I looked at the grid and I was, "Geez, I don't think we have people up there. Are you sure that grid is right?" I think I got this one from the Marine Direct Air Support Center, DASC they call it. They control all the air assets. I called it back. I said, "Geez, I don't think we have anybody that far north yet." All our transmissions and guidance went through them.

I rechecked the grid. The DASC read it back and that was the grid they gave me. I said, "Damn, this thing is way up there." I said, "All right, well, let's go." So we started going up the road and going up and going up, and I said, "Tell me when we stop seeing friendly people." We would see one Marine vehicle and maybe one more way out there, and it started getting really thinned out.

We went all the way up there, and past them. Came some M-1 tanks that were blocking the highway. That was the furthest north I'd seen our people, but the grid was further up than that. I said "Well, maybe there is something up there. I've got to go check." The Marines would do that a lot. They would fight something, and then they would pull back a little bit, calling the wrong grid where they were at. They give you a contact frequency

for the guys on the ground, but it almost never works. You know, you are happy when it does and you actually can talk to the guys on the ground. It all works out where they are monitoring that frequency and they are paying attention, or if it is the right frequency.

Q: Was that problem just with the Marines, or did you have the same problem with the Army?

A: Oh, it happens with Army guys, too. You don't always get to talk to the guy. The frequency passed to him isn't the same information we're passed. Sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't. Or you can't even talk to them, because their radio is so weak, being on the ground, until you are damn near right on top of them. So when you are asking questions a ways out, you aren't getting any information, until you get close to them.

So I say, "Well we've got to go check that grid." We went past the tanks, and ran into two Marine Cobras up there shooting some stuff, and I thought "Geez, there's nothing at that grid." So I'm calling on my frequency, "Okay, well, I checked. There's nobody there."

At least we had the two Cobras up there; they happened to be up there destroying something. So I whipped around and we came back, and sure enough the pickup site was at those tanks. I had to pick up a first sergeant; he had his arm blown off. I actually got in touch with the Marines on the ground, because when they see us flying around they started calling on that frequency. See, they are not monitoring; they are not paying attention.

That happened a lot, where you would fly past the friendly lines, because that's the grid they gave me. But I was thinking maybe there's something up there, but if I don't go up there and check, even if I am not talking to anybody, maybe there is somebody up there. Maybe there's a little element up there, and they're trying to get somebody EVAC'd. So we'd always go up there and check and turn around. That happened a lot. In Al Kut it happened, too.

You don't really know where the lines end. We don't want to get shot down up there, you know. Nobody is with us.

Q: How about the aircraft itself? How did it perform?

A: I think it is a good plane. The ones in our company are pretty old, because they are all hand-me-downs from the Army; the air assault divisions and stuff like that. The one I had was the oldest one in our fleet. It was a 1980 model. I think it is going away; it is all cracked and old needs to be refurbished and everything. It is an older Black Hawk, one of the first ones that ever came out.

That's the one I had through the whole war. I kept it all the way to the end, brought it all the way back to Kuwait, and it worked pretty good. I mean, there's little things that happened, but I'd fix them along the way and things. For the most part they worked well.

I worked with Apaches in Kosovo and Bosnia. If you'd compare it to another aircraft, it is designed totally different. The engineering that they put into the Apache is just crap, actually. Whoever designed it didn't think about a lot of things. The way they engineered how the aircraft is going to work, or where they put this part, how this one is going to affect this one.

With the Black Hawk, I think they really did a good job and have improved on it over the years. I think it is a pretty good aircraft, especially the new ones authorized today. They change them as they are going along. They modify them, and I think it is a really good aircraft. I've picked up new ones, like '98 models when I was in Germany on my last assignment. New, right from the factory, and those were really nice. They work really well. That's a leaner model. It's an L model, a newer model than the Alpha model.

They learned from the A models that they made during the '80s and the very earliest ones. They made those up until like '88-'89, and then they came out with the L model that the Army's buying since then.

So the Alpha models from 1979 they improved with the leaner "L" model. It is a much better aircraft, but it is generally the same aircraft. It has a little bit different engines in it, and they work a little bit better. From the overall standpoint, I think the Black Hawk is a real good aircraft.

Q: What would be some lessons learned?

A: Well, if they wanted us to support the Marines for that invasion, the majority of us thought, "Geez, this isn't enough people to do this. This is not enough people. I can't believe we are doing this. The whole thing. Not just our sector, not just the Marines, the whole damn thing." Then we started getting up in here. We're not even in An Nasiriyah, going up that road, and the attrition is just phenomenal. I mean, we see it because we are picking up these Marines. I was thinking, "My God, this isn't going good. This isn't going good at all."

Actually I saw a Marine full-bird colonel at one point, somewhere north of An Nasiriyah, when we were going up those routes. I talked to him because he had come over to thank us for what we were doing. He was at our location because he was seeing the division commander. He was one of the regimental combat team commanders, and he came over to say "thanks for picking up my guys and doing what you are doing."

I just started asking him [how it was going], because you are kind of in a little bubble. You don't really know what is going on, the big picture. Nobody really does out there. I

mean, there's a few people that have the big picture. But all we do is get all the wounded, all the bad crap. So I asked him, "Are things going good out there? Are you guys doing anything, because all we are picking up is a lot of wounded and dying guys." And he reassured me that yeah, they were taking a lot of hits in these first few towns north of An Nasiriyah, all these little towns, but they had figured out a way to bypass them, or do other things.

That's at the point where they had to go back and mop up what they had bypassed. It wasn't going like they thought it was going to go, where these people kind of just gave up. So we held in place for about three days in that area, as they went back down that Route Seven and through all those towns to clean up some stuff.

I think they could have used a lot more people to do the whole invasion. They wanted our Air Ambulance Company to support the Marines, so we were all spread out throughout this whole sector, just our company. Just six aircraft. . . well, six and three. The three stayed with Task Force Tarawa in Basrah, the Brits' area. Then they kind of stayed down here by An Nasiriyah, and supported this other little task force that the Marines had.

So we really had to do a lot of work. You know, the Marines have got to get their own damn MEDEVAC. If they want to keep using us, they need to do it with a lot more companies, which the Army can't provide, because we don't have enough to do what we do.

See, the thing was that the Marines rely on aero medical evacuation 100 percent. They are not used to doing a big invasion. This is a long ways for them [Kuwait to Baghdad, 250 miles]; they don't do stuff like that. So they relied on air quite a bit. They didn't do anything by ground – not evacuation-wise. So it really tasks us even more. At least the Army trains to use their ground EVAC assets, because they know that they can't rely on air ambulances to take care of everything. That's the way the Army works.

The Marines just think that everything goes by helicopter. So that really puts a task on us, because almost every one of their casualties has got to be air EVAC'd one way or the other. Dead guys, too, and we can't get involved in that. Then you are tying up our aircraft that we don't have enough space in for guys that are wounded and can maybe still make it. You want us to fly dead guys back to the rear. No. They are dead. I'm sorry about that, but that's a supply issue.

Q: That's a quartermaster function. [Mortuary Affairs registration is a logistics responsibility in the Army.]

A: Yes. We even had Oliver North himself get pissed off at us about that. We had a little altercation with him. [Note: See interview with CPT Adrian Salvetti] But, hey, don't try blaming us for it, you know. There were times they tried to blame us for a guy who died

because he didn't get EVAC'd fast enough. There's all kinds of variables in this; it's not just 100 percent our fault, but they wanted to make it our fault, or they tried to.

I wanted to try telling them, "Hey, what about blaming the Iraqis? They shot him." There's a lot of things going on: how much time it took to get the call back to us, and this and that, and EVACing them along way back. Then this guy ended up dying. They didn't try to blame us 100 percent, but they tried to blame the patient evacuation team the Navy had set up. I mean, this is just something that happens; it happens in war. But they wanted to do an investigation in the middle of the war about a Marine that died because he didn't get EVAC'd fast enough. We're talking about an hour and a half, or something like this. This was somewhere between An Nasiriyah and Baghdad, if you split the difference; somewhere in the middle.

Q: Any other areas that you think were particularly significant? How about your integration into the tactical plan? Did they really work you into their plans?

A: No. They really never did, I don't think. Not 100 percent. Not 80 percent. I think there's probably a few people on the Marine side that tried to do that, definitely our commanders and operations captains. But they just kind of think we do our own thing. Or they want you there, but they don't coordinate any thing. It never really was 100 percent there.

I wouldn't want to do it again with them, put it that way. I'd tell them, "You do what you have been doing, EVACing by your CH-46. If you don't like what we do, then do it that way."

They really never gave us credit for what we did. I didn't feel that they did. Maybe onesie, twosie, a few guys like that, but a lot of them had a lot of animosity towards you if you are not a Marine. Probably do that with everybody, let alone some Army helicopter pilots.

There's a couple that come up to you, those commanders, "Hey thanks for what you are doing out here." You know, they go out of their way to come up and thank you. But the real resentful ones are the CH-46 pilots. I don't want anything to do with those guys. I don't even want to see those guys again. We didn't do anything to them, but they were always on our case.

Q: Is that because you were scarfing their missions?

A: I don't know. I guess so. But we couldn't do 100 percent of them, and then they would have to do them because they were already integrated out there. They're still out there in general support. That's the way they are, that's the way they are indoctrinated.

They send out a couple aircraft every day to each regimental combat team, to run ammo, run bullets, run wounded, run dead, run food, run water – whatever they need. These guys would fly for like 48 hours at a time, and they always fly dual ships, guns on both sides. They fly up from Ali Al Salem Airbase where they have a shower, food, and all kinds of other things.

They can get a different aircraft there, and fly all the way up, relieve a couple that are up there so they could fly back. They would be up there two days, sometimes three, but if they have to be up there like four days, oh they are really bitching. They are complaining that their relief isn't there. I'm telling them, "Hey, I haven't been back to Kuwait in 35 days. I haven't had a shower in 35 days. I've eaten nothing but MREs and I have boxed water." Thank God that our company flies logistic runs up to us from Kuwait. They would haul water up and give it to us whenever we would meet up with them. We supply ourselves with that, but who do you think steals it. The Marine pilots do. They don't care if they steal our food, our water, then they complain about us. And they get to go back every couple of days.

You know, they are not as tightly scheduled, because they have a couple of squadrons of these guys that they can farm from. We just have our one company and our six aircraft. And all six aircraft stayed with the 1st Marine Division the whole time. We never went back. I didn't get back to Kuwait for 35 or 40 days when I had my first shower, and that was just a field type, a little thing. That happened somewhere around the middle of the war, when the rest of the company jumped up for two days (which was stupid. I don't know why they ever did that.) So the Marine pilots got to go back all the time, and maybe get a couple nights rest. But we are just going nonstop, every day.

Q: So you are not going to send a Christmas card to any CH-46 pilots this year?

A: No. Nope; none. Nope.

Q: Well, I'll be danged.

A: And then they brag and say that they had to take all our missions because we were too afraid to do them. I'm thinking, "What do you think we've been doing?" We pick up Marines nonstop. I'm sure we can't get all of them, but we you are right there with the ground force, and if something does happen, they throw the casualties on right there, because we're flying back. It's just teamwork. That's what happens.

We're not going to get everyone that's out there. These six aircraft are not going to get every stinking wounded guy that's out there, you know. I think I probably picked up over 100 in my aircraft alone, in just 30 days and 180 hours of flight time, and sometimes ten or eleven hours of flying nonstop in one day. Well, that's the way they were.

Q: How was the redeployment back here?

A: Our aircraft were pretty much used up, so we had to go. We were useless without our aircraft, and at least they planned to get us out of there right away, meaning like the end of May when we started that process of trying to get out of there.

I guess it went OK. We sat there for like two weeks and did nothing. I was happy to get back. We're still recovering from our deployment – trying to get these aircraft fixed.

Q: There are a lot of parts out there. [Referring to the 498th Air Ambulance Company hangar at Fort Benning.]

A: Yeah. Aircraft are expensive to maintain.

Q: What is the biggest challenge in rebuilding these planes?

A: Getting them cleaned up. Getting all that dirt and dust and things like that out of them. You've pretty much got to disassemble them completely to clean out all that stuff. Then do all the maintenance checks and procedures it requires for removing all those components and putting them back together.

Helicopters are much more maintenance-intensive aircraft than an airplane, just because it has a lot more moving parts. That's just the way it is. That's why not too many people own helicopters as much as they own airplanes. Comparatively it is just cheaper to own an airplane. There is just not that many moving parts. Less moving parts are less parts that need to be replaced, whether they're bad, or whether, after a certain number of flying hours, they say that you need to replace them; that's all they guarantee them for. So you have all these higher spec engineered components on this aircraft that cost a heck of a lot as you need to replace them because the aircraft flew 50 hours, or 100 hours, or 1,000 hours.

That's why too many people don't own helicopters as much as they own airplanes. It is cheaper to own a Lear jet probably, just because of the maintenance.

Q: Anything else you want to add? What would you say was the thing you were proudest of?

A: I was proudest that we did it. I was glad that our unit was chosen to be attached to the Marines, and we got to do it as an entire unit. They were thinking about splitting us up, with some of the company going to go work one place, and some of us going to support the Marines.

I was glad all fourteen aircraft supported the Marines – the whole company supported the Marine division – and we were the only ones doing it. So we did it. We did everything they wanted us to do and more, and we all made it back alive.

Q: Yes. And that's good.

A: Yes.

Q: Well, Mr. Wright, thank you very much for the interview.

A: You're welcome.

Q: And thank you for your contribution, for what you all did.

A: Thanks.

AMEDD ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM
INTERVIEW OIF 067

INTERVIEW WITH
SSG GREGORY GIVINGS
498TH MEDICAL COMPANY (AIR AMBULANCE)

CONDUCTED BY
COL RICHARD VAN NESS GINN, USA, RET.
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA
19 AUGUST 2003

OFFICE OF MEDICAL HISTORY
OFFICE OF THE SURGEON GENERAL, U.S. ARMY/
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. ARMY MEDICAL COMMAND
FALLS CHURCH, VIRGINIA

Q: Today is 20 August 2003, and we are talking to SSG Gregory Givings. SGT Givings, what was your job?

A: I'm a flight medic, sir, 91W.

Q: Have you fully transitioned to 91W?

A: Yes, sir. I'm complete. Most 91Cs are completely transitioned over.

Q: Well, that's outstanding.

A: I just happen to be one of them, being a graduate, so that automatically transitioned us over.

Q: So you're all set now. What is your background, where are you from, your life story?

A: I'm from Georgia, from a little town, Waycross, on the Florida/Georgia line, 45 minutes away from Jacksonville, Florida. I graduated from Waycross High School, and went to school at Georgia Southern. Then I joined the Army.

Q: Why did you join the Army?

A: I come from a military family. My father was sergeant major, and I have six brothers and sisters that are all military.

Q: The entire family?

A: Entire family.

Q: Are they all Army?

A: They are all Army. Yes, sir. Two of my brothers are Special Forces. I have a sister that is a JAG attorney, and the others are nurses.

Q: Outstanding. Congratulations.

A: My mother is a warden at the prison at home.

Q: Your dad must be proud.

A: He is. He tells me that he is.

Q: Who tells the biggest stories?

A: Well, I think I get to tell the best stories, because I see a lot of it. My brothers are in Special Forces and they don't tell anything. But I get to tell a lot of the stuff – medical stories, things like that.

Q: Are you married?

A: Yes, sir. I am married. I have a wife; she is from Ghana. I met her in Israel. I was stationed over in Egypt, as part of the MFO. She was going to school in Israel. She was there studying anthropology. I've been to Egypt three times. Our relationship continued while she was back and forth, and we finally got married.

Q: Does she work here?

A: She is in in-home nursing, in Florida; that's where she's at. She's not actually here, because I just got back and we just haven't had the opportunity to move her back here yet.

Q: Was she employed before you went to Iraq?

A: No, she was back in Ghana. She moved back to Ghana with her mother before we went to Iraq.

Q: Will she be able to relocate to Columbus?

A: Yes.

Q: How much longer will you be here at Fort Benning?

A: Well, hopefully no more than six months.

Q: And then where?

A: I'm trying to get an instructing job down at Fort Sam Houston, with the 91Ws.

Q: Do you plan to have a family?

A: I would like to have a family.

Q: Describe your 91W training, and do you think it prepared you for what you did in Iraq?

A: No, I don't think it prepared me for it. I have thirteen years in the Army and I thought I would be prepared for war, but I don't think anyone is ever really prepared, especially on the medical side of the house, because we saw a lot. I saw a lot, being up north. I was attached to the 1st Marine Division.

I was very prepared with my medical skills, but as far as being mentally prepared to see so many severely wounded patients, I don't think I was ready for that. It took me a day or two to get myself prepared to actually deal with it, and after a mission to be able to sit back and say, "Okay, that mission is over and now I'm ready to take another one." I think it took a day or two for most of my guys.

I was a team sergeant for FSMT-1, and after the missions we would all get together and talk to make sure we all had a clear head. So I think that was pretty much it. But as far as my training and everything, I think I was very prepared for it. Like I said, it was just actually seeing some guys killed or things like that, and dealing with the Iraqi civilians.

Q: What would be a typical mission?

A: Most of my missions consisted of Marines that had either been shot, or that had been in vehicle rollover accidents. Also, I did a few EPWs, Enemy Prisoners of War; I did a few of those transfers. And I did maybe five or six civilians and three children. So that was pretty much a day for me.

Dealing with civilians that were hit – most were females who had stepped on land mines. Like I said, the Marines were either shot or had been in vehicle accidents. The EPWs were shot, and some of them were just being transferred out.

Q: What kind of shape were the Marines in when you got them? Had work already been started?

A: The work had been started on most of them. There was usually a corpsman or a doctor at some of the places, but not all of them. Sometimes I would pick up from the site where they were at. Well, not that site, but a site that they had been moved back to by the CH-46s, the Marine 46s, and then I'd pick them up and I'd start my care on them from there. But most of them had already been pretty much taken care of, and all I did was provide in-flight care for them.

Q: What kinds of things were you doing?

A: Vital signs. If any of them required resuscitative breathing, I did that and my crew chief helped me. Managing any bleeding, or anything like that, was basically what I provided for them in flight.

Q: How about the Iraqi civilians or EPWs you picked up? Had those people been stabilized or treated?

A: Most of them had been stabilized, but some of them had just been injured. The EPWs were being moved from some of the field hospitals, so they had already been treated.

There wasn't too much I could do for them, because not all of them were zip-tied or secured when we picked them up, so that entailed me having to have my weapon ready and my crew chief having his, because not all of them had been strapped down.

Q: By zip-tied, do you mean handcuffed with plastic ties?

A: Yes sir.

Q: How was it, working with the Marines?

A: I enjoyed it. I wish we had had more of a chance to practice working together before this war, because this was like a practice run to us. We had the PET team. They were set up, but they really didn't know what we were capable of doing, or what our capabilities were. The nurses they had in there really couldn't distinguish what an urgent patient was from a priority or a routine patient.

So, for the first week or two that I was up north, my team leader and I had to go back and forth and explain to them that this is what we consider an urgent patient, and this is what we consider a priority patient. Once we got all of that straight, it was actually a pretty good working relationship. I worked with some of the corpsmen, and got to know some of the corpsmen that flew on the 46s, and we went over different ways we did our jobs. I think it was a very good experience.

Q: Were there differences with the Navy corpsmen in your practice and training?

A: There were just very, very minor differences. They were so minor I can't really remember, but they were just very minor differences. Other than that, it was pretty much the same, I think.

Q: How about the Marine culture?

A: That was very different. Just being around the Marines was a lot different from what I'm used to on an everyday basis. I mean, to actually be called staff sergeant. When I hear staff sergeant in the Army, that means I'm about to be chewed out, whereas, in the Marines they were calling you staff sergeant because that's your rank. I was actually amazed by some of the Marines, and I thought their military bearing was pretty outstanding. I noticed that no matter what they were doing, they just seemed to maintain their bearing, even when we were under stressful conditions. If we were flying in to pick up some patients, and they didn't know what to do around the aircraft and I was yelling, "Don't go near this part of the aircraft" or things like that, it was still "Yes, staff sergeant." I thought that was pretty outstanding.

Q: Did you run into any memorable characters?

A: There was one named Lance Davenport. He was with the 1st MARDIV. He was a corpsman, and he and I worked together. We got to know each other from day one when we [the 498th] moved down into what we called the snake pit, which was right down from the Air Force base where we were at. We got to know each other the first day we moved there, and from then on we started working together.

He was the one who introduced me to this thing called a "QuikClot." It is used if you have a patient with hemorrhaging. You just rip it out of the bag, twist it, put it on the patient and it automatically clots it. It stops you from having to use a tourniquet.

Q: Is that the Chitosan bandage?

A: I don't think so. This is just like an ice pack. I'd never seen it before. You just break it up, put it on the wound and it automatically clots it. He gave me one and I went to our commander and explained it to him, and he tried to get some ordered, because this was just before the war started. So Davenport is the guy that I will always remember. We e-mail each other back and forth now, because he is getting ready to go to Liberia. I e-mail him whenever I get a chance and he e-mails me back, so that's probably the most memorable person that I remember over there.

Q: How was the deployment? Your wife went back to Ghana at that point, is that correct?

A: She was already in Ghana before we left.

Q: So it was just you having to move out.

A: Right. For me it went smoothly. The tempo picked up around the company a lot, which I kind of liked, because it made my days go by quicker. They were long days, but everything was moving so fast, you didn't have time to think about it. I live over in Wedgefield Court Apartments, which is off South Lumpkin Road. My landlord, instead of making me move out, just cut my rent down from what it was to $125 a month, and I could leave everything in my apartment. She would maintain my apartment because she knew that I was going, so I was really appreciative to her for that.

Q: Would many people do that in Columbus?

A: No. A lot of the guys in the platoon had to move out of their apartments. Her father built these apartments that we were in. They were built for military guys, and that's basically all that's over there, military personnel. So for everyone that went off to the desert, she cut their rent to $125 a month. It is pretty much what I would have paid for a storage fee, and all I had to do was keep my utilities on, which was nothing.

Q: She deserves a word of thanks, doesn't she?

A: Yes. I brought her a flag back that we flew in Baghdad. We framed it, and I gave it to her. That was thanks for that.

Q: Were there other members of your unit living there who got the same deal?

A: No. I am the only one that lived out there, but once they found out about it, there were other people who wanted to move out there. She's gotten a lot of business since then, because I told everyone.

Q: That's great. It's just the opposite of what happens sometimes. So for you the deployment was pretty uneventful, mostly a matter of picking up the tempo?

A: It was kind of hectic for me because I'm the medical supply sergeant. I was getting stuff in from USAMMA left and right, and I was running back and forth to the hospital trying to get all of these supplies they were pushing in to us. I was on the ADVON team also, so I had to try to get all of my supplies in, plus get them into the MILVANs – items that were being left out of our ISU-90s – and I hadn't even gotten all my stuff in yet.

So, pretty much the only hectic part about it was, "How am I going to get all these supplies?" Until I was able to speak with Miss Kay Wilson, up at the hospital, who worked with me. She told me, "Anything that you get after you've left, I'll push it out to you." And the 36th Engineer Group allowed us to put stuff in their MILVAN. A lot of my supplies that came in after I left were brought down here from the hospital because Miss Wilson had it taken care of, put in the MILVANs, and then it came over to us. Other than that, that was about as hectic as I needed it to be.

Q: How was the medical supply once you were in country?

A: When we first got there in country, there was nothing set up as far as our med supply, nothing at all. They had nothing. My understanding was that we would be falling in on something and just taking over, but I had to go over there, set up an account and get everything done.

A MAJ Sallas at Doha worked with us very well. He made sure everything was running well for us. At first, the med supply warehouse there didn't want to work with us, because we weren't part of a permanent party and we didn't have any other supplies set up at the time.

Once we got to Arifjan, they introduced me to T-CAM [TAMMIS – Customer Assistance Module], which is a program used for ordering med supplies. That worked while we were in Arifjan, but once we moved down into the snake pit in Ali Al Salem, it didn't work because of the phone lines. Getting out through the internet with the Air Force was real hard, because the Air Force was limiting us to what we could and could not do online.

I got help once I was able to get with MAJ Sallas and sit down and explain to him our problems. Then I got with one of the majors, MAJ Burns, from 3d MEDCOM, and he helped me out with T-CAM. He provided us with assistance, because we had to come up with a plan for once the unit pushed forward, how we were going to get information back to the rear when we needed supplies brought out to us.

So I sat down with my XO at the time, CPT McMann. He and I sat down and came up with a plan. We would come up with a standardized list of what we thought we would need on the front, and every time a log pack came in, we would send that information out and they'd bring it to us. The Marines promised to drop off anything to us. Every time they did a run, they'd drop off supplies to us, because we knew once we moved forward, we wouldn't be able to set up and automatically get to a landline site. Other than that, everything else ran pretty smoothly.

It took me probably a month and a half to actually get everything straight and running where the med supply was smooth enough for me to pass it off to someone, since I was a team sergeant and moving forward. I passed it off to a SGT Midgen, who had done med supply before. I just gave him my continuity book, and he ran from there with it. Everything was already set up, and all he had to do was call these contacts that I had made.

Q: You were pretty busy.

A: I was pretty busy. Yes.

Q: Was there any particular supply item or equipment you just couldn't get?

A: All the equipment that I needed we had before we left here. USAMMA had pushed it down to us. When I first got to the unit, which was about a year and a half ago, the only thing they had here was LifePak 10s. But before we left, we got Propaqs, ventilators, infusion sets, IV pumps. We received all that equipment. The only thing was that it was all new equipment and none of us were trained on it.

So once I got over there I had to have someone give us classes on how to use this equipment, and determine if it needed to go forward with us. The only thing we took forward was the LifePak 10s and the Propaqs, because we figured we'd never have time to set a patient up on a ventilator or anything like that.

Q: Propaq: what does that stand for?

A: A Propaq is a monitoring system. It reads blood pressure for you, does your O2 saturation, your respirations and everything.

Q: And the other one is the...

A: LifePak 10, that's a defibrillator.

Q: Did you use that much?

A: Most of my guys said they used it just for pacing vital signs when the battery died on their Propaq, because a lot of the aircraft didn't have internal plugs for them to plug in to recharge their batteries. So a lot of them were used just for pacing and getting patient information, vital signs and things like that.

I think I had to use mine once with a nurse on board, and that was on an Iraqi civilian. That was the only time I've ever heard of anyone having actually used theirs.

Q: What kinds of problems did you encounter with the equipment inside the helicopter?

A: We didn't have any problems except for the Propaqs. The way we had them set up in the aircraft, they needed a hard case or something with an outer shell, because I had two that came back and the display screen was cracked due to it moving around and everything.

The LifePak 10 defibrillator is stored in what we called the hellhole in the storage area of the aircraft.

Q: Where is that?

A: It is in the very back.

Q: You access it from inside the helicopter?

A: Yes, sir. You access it from inside. But it is kind of tricky if you have your patients in there and you are trying to move around. So we took ours and mounted it from the top of the aircraft between my seat and the crew chief's seat. If I opened it up, wires and everything fell out all over the place. But it was accessible to me if I needed it. I recommended that a lot of guys do it. Everyone else just set up what they thought was best for them. The Propaq comes with a finger monitor used for measuring O-2 saturation in the blood. Those were getting lost left and right. And they were sticky, so once the sand hit them, you would get inaccurate readings on them. Other than that, that's pretty much the equipment problems that I know of.

Q: How about the carousel for loading the litters?

A: We tried another configuration before we left, but the Marines didn't like it, and 3d MEDCOM didn't approve of it either. We were going to remove the carousel. We would carry four patients, and just put them on the floorboard of the aircraft.

I didn't care for that setup, either. I am used to flying in Hueys. Most of my flight time is in Hueys, and we had the stanchions and straps. That's what we tried to order before we left. We couldn't get them in time, but we would have used those.

The [carousel] litter pans we set up for four litter patients worked pretty well, just using the seat belts to secure the patients. They didn't work all the time, but we had litter straps to secure them onto the litter pans if we needed to.

Q: So, all things considered, the carousel did OK?

A: I think the carousel did OK, but I would have preferred the old Huey stanchions and straps. I would have preferred that, because it was less bulky and it gave me more freedom to move around. With the carousel, if I had four patients in the fly position [longitudinal], I'm having to jump up to try to get to both sides of the litter pan to see them.

So that is why I would have preferred the way the Huey is set up. Other than that, I really didn't have any problems.

Q: To be clear, describe how the litters were placed in the Huey versus how they'd end up on the Black Hawk carousel.

A: Once you put them into the Huey, you have two straps on each side that hang down, plus stanchions. You just load your patients head-in from the side.

Q: So they are perpendicular to and across the helicopter.

A: Perpendicular and across. Exactly.

Q: Not running lengthwise.

A: Exactly.

Q: And the advantage for you as a medic?

A: I was able to maneuver between those litter straps if a patient needed my attention, or if I had to do suction or anything. Whereas with the litter pan, I would have to reach over, or have my crew chief do it if it was on his side.

Q: Because they're in the litter pans on the carousel and lying lengthwise in the helicopter.

A: Exactly.

Q: We are continuing to talk with SSG Gregory Givings. We are discussing the differences in loading the patients on the litters within the old UH-1 Huey versus the UH-60 Black Hawk. SGT Givings is making some good points about how to enhance patient access for the medic.

A: With the Huey just having straps and stanchions, I can actually get up and move around the stanchions that the patient is strapped into, and do anything that I need to do. I have freedom to move from side to side, and pretty much all the way around, whereas with the litter pans, I am limited to just how far around [the patient] I can go. I would actually have to turn the carousel around, or I would have to squeeze up under a litter pan in order to get to a patient. That's why I prefer the Huey setup over the carousel.

I think the carousel is great for back hauling in garrison, but for what we were doing in Iraq at the front, I think the Huey configuration would have been the best.

Q: In this conflict, you all moved fast. There was pretty intense engagement. What was the effect of that in terms of fatigue?

A: I was the overall team sergeant for two teams. We moved very fast. We jumped every other day. If we were pulling night missions in which I was a night crew, and if we jumped early in the morning, you were tired. But at some point during the day you got the time to catch up on some sleep. Overall, during the time that you jumped you had time to catch up on your rest.

There was one jump that I know of that we had a problem. It was a jump that happened unexpectedly when the crews were out at crew rest. We called back to the Marines to let them know that the entire team was out at crew rest and they would need to use their aircraft, because we were flying more and picking up more patients than the Marines.

So the Marines understood that. They gave us a day and a half off and we all caught up. Other than that, I think pretty much you couldn't sleep during the day if you were the night crew, because you were sleeping in your aircraft. When the temperature reached 100 and something outside, you can imagine what it was like inside the aircraft.

Other than that, I was never really fatigued too much. None of my guys ever complained about it, except for that one time.

Q: In telling stories to your brothers and sisters, what would be some that you'd tell that would be the most interesting?

A: My most interesting story was when we had gotten a mission to go pick up an Iraqi national who had been injured in a car wreck. On the way out we saw a flare and I told my pilots, "I think they are down there." The pilot is like, "Well, we're not there yet, because we still have another four or five miles before we get there."

I said, "Well, I saw a flare on the ground." So we turned around and called down to see if someone had sent out a flare. They had a fuel truck that had driven off into a ravine and they had been having problems getting commo out to get any medical help. It just so happened we were flying over.

We got to the scene. There was nowhere for my pilot to land, so they found the closest spot they could. I jumped off the aircraft and got to the site. There was a male that had been pulled out of the truck already. There was a female that was stuck in the truck, and the truck was still hanging over the ravine. They were afraid that it was going to fall off.

I think that's where, being a medic, I didn't really think anything about it. I jumped down in the truck and grabbed her. The truck fell over in the ravine ten or fifteen minutes later. That was a highlight, because I actually felt like I had saved someone's life. So that was my big story to tell back home as far as, you know, far as the good things. That was my best story.

Q: What would have been one of your roughest missions?

A: One of my roughest missions wasn't actually a mission for me. We were on an LZ, and the Marines came in with two 46s. They had patients on board the aircraft, and they hadn't called us and told us. They just picked these patients up, because there was a big fight. They saw our aircraft and dropped off the patients, and they had a couple of KIAs. Being the senior person, I was dictating who would take what patients, and my crew was going to take the KIAs back.

As we got the KIAs loaded onto the aircraft, we got a mission, so we had to take the KIAs off. We had one aircraft that was broken and they were planning on getting back up. So I gave that KIA to that aircraft, and told them when they got up to move him. But they never got up.

We went out, took the mission, and came back at nine or ten o'clock at night, and the KIA was still there. I called over to the Marines, to the PET team to tell them, "Hey, we need mortuary affairs out here to move a body." He had been messed up pretty bad. The back of his head was blown off and his brains were hanging out.

Q: They hadn't bagged him?

A: They hadn't bagged him at all; all they did was put a sweatshirt over his head. They thought that we had body bags, but we explained to them that we didn't carry body bags. That was the one time that I was upset with the Marines, because they never did send anyone over there. They kept telling us that we needed to watch and take care of the body until they could get mortuary affairs. But mortuary affairs was too far south to come at that point.

So my crew chief and I sat up until two in the morning watching the body – because there were stray dogs and things out there – to make sure none of those stray dogs came over and did anything to the body. I called all night telling them, "Hey, could you at least just come and pick up the body and put him on the back of a truck or something like that? That way we will at least be able to sleep."

But they never did. They blew us off. I had a meeting with one of the Marine generals when he came up, and I explained to him that I thought that I didn't appreciate that, because it was a KIA and it is not our job to watch them. We are not supposed to haul KIAs, but due to the fact that we were working with the Marines, our company commander said it was OK, and we were hauling KIAs for them. So that was probably the worst memory that I have, or one of the worst.

Another one was a young boy. An 18-year-old and his 8-year-old brother were out herding their goats. A convoy came by and startled the goats, and the little boy was running out trying to huddle the goats back up. As he was trying to huddle the goats, he was shot up pretty bad.

The 18-year-old brother jumped on top of him and covered him up while he was being fired upon. So we had to carry him. He was in and out of consciousness throughout the flight, and he was scared. That was probably the worst memory that I have.

Q: Did either one of them make it?

A: The older brother just had gunshot wounds to his right leg. But the little boy was shot up in the chest pretty bad, and he had a gunshot wound to his head.

The following day I went back to the field hospital where we dropped them off and I asked about them. They told me the little boy had died that morning, but the 18-year-old was OK. Like I said, he just had gunshot wounds to the leg.

Q: Did you have much in the way of contact with the civilian population to get any opinions of the people?

A: No, sir, not really. We flew into one spot that we were taking over. The Marines had taken over a soccer stadium, but the perimeters weren't really set up that well, because there were people coming in and out of the perimeter throughout the day. This was when we first got there. They had some people coming to tell the Marines where they could find the Republican Guards, because the soccer stadium we were set up in also housed some of the Iraqi officers from the military. There was a museum there, I guess it was a war museum – or it was an airborne school, that's what it was. So, they were coming to tell the Marines where they could find some of the Guard. The officers had run and hid within the town.

I only dealt with a few of the Iraqi people themselves that I could get to know anything about them.

I had a mission where a female had aborted a baby at four months, and the Marines called us and asked if we would take her back to the hospital. We were there to pick up a translator for the Marines who had been shot in the back, in the center of his spine. While we were there, the doctor on the ground asked if we would wait because he had another patient coming, and explained to us what the patient was.

I told him that we would wait. The only thing was that we couldn't stop the woman from bleeding, because her husband wouldn't allow us to look under her dress, or put our hands or anything under her dress or anything like that. So that was a culture shock for me, because here is your wife laying there bleeding, and she had the fetus with her wrapped in cotton. Once we got her on the aircraft, I did what I had to do, which was to try to control the bleeding and put some gauze up under her dress. Other than that, that was about it.

Q: Going back to the KIA incident. When you talked to the general, what did he say?

A: The general asked questions. I was keeping a journal of everything that happened from the time we left up until the time that we got back. I kept a journal of day-to-day things that happened with the Marines, with the company, with me and with everyone. He asked for a name, and I had to go get my journal and tell him who the major was that I spoke to at the PET team, who, in the general's words himself, was "blowing me off." He didn't think it was right that the KIA laid out on the ground overnight. I think it was like four or five in the morning when someone finally came to pick up the KIA.

So the general got the name of the major that I spoke with. It was a private that had answered the phone at first, and I told him what we had going on. He patched me through to the major that was on duty that night. I don't know what the general said to the major, but about two or three days later when we jumped again, the major came over. He and I had a talk, and he apologized for his actions.

I told him an apology wasn't something that I was looking for. It was just that at the time I was upset that here was one of our guys (Marine, Army or what have you) who was lying on the ground. He was deceased and I didn't think that was right. We couldn't put him in the aircraft, because that's where all our guys were sleeping. I couldn't make my guys sleep out on the ground at that time, because they needed their crew rest; they were the early morning crew. During the time that my crew chief and I sat up and watched him, I think he was OK.

Q: Who was the crew chief?

A: SPC Tilley.

Q: Who was your pilot?

A: My PIC was CW2 Paul Bryant and the PI was CW2 Rick Mallet. Tilley was our crew chief.

Q: How did you end up becoming a flight medic?

A: I was a ground medic at first, and then I moved from Germany to Fort Riley, Kansas. My platoon sergeant there was going off to become a flight medic, and after he graduated from the course, he came back and told us how good it was. He thought we should try to get into it, and he talked to the medics that he thought would make good flight medics.

I put in my paperwork and I was accepted. I've been doing it for nine years now.

Q: At that point, were you a 91B?

A: Yes, sir. I was a 91B.

Q: Had you ever considered 91C?

A: I thought about 91C, but I am not a hospital person. I'd rather be outside, busy doing work instead of being inside. When I go to the hospital, I want to do what I have to do, and then that be it.

Q: Which course do you want to teach when you go to Fort Sam as an instructor?

A: I want to teach the baby whiskies [91Ws]. I want to do the AIT students. If I'm not, then I want to slowly work my way over to that department.

Q: That's the phrase now, baby whiskey?

A: Yes.

Q: What is their MOS when they complete AIT?

A: They are 91W. But I'm not sure if they're fully transitioned 91W, or if they still have their identifier, because there are some things that you have to do to be an EMT – to actually have your identifier "I" removed.

Q: Is the identifier the letter I?

A: I think it is.

Q: For intermediate?

A: Intermediate. Well, no, the intermediate, it's 91 Whiskey, Yankee; I'm not sure. Something like that.

Q: What were the lessons learned?

A: From my point of view, I think we should set up some type of training where the Army is going to go and work with the Marines and the Navy all at once, a yearly thing, or every other year, so that when there is some type of deployment we are not learning all over again from each other. I don't think that is the time to learn from each other. I think the time to learn is while we are back here at home, but not during a peacekeeping mission. Maybe the Marines could come to the NTC and work with us, or JRTC.

I would like to see something like that. That way we'd all know what everyone's plan is. "This is what the PET team does, the PET team is responsible for this, this is what Army MEDEVAC does," things like that, so we don't have to sit out there and take time to teach that. You know, we make mistakes as we go along. I mean, mistakes are going to be made, I'm sure, no matter what, but I think with some training back here at the home front, I think we could make it better.

Q: It sounds like Army Dustoff in Iraq would go to the point of wounding and set down almost anywhere.

A: They made a mistake one night, and thought that our crew was a CH-46, which carries weapons. The only thing we have, of course, was the two pilots and the medic carry 9 mils [9mm pistol], and the crew chief carries an M-16. They thought that we were a -46, and they had us flying into An Nasiriyah one night. We flew in and landed. There was a battle going on in the spot we landed. We had to get out of there, because we were unarmed and unescorted. Once we got back, we went in and had a talk with the PET. At the time, there was a call that came through from the Air Force that they were getting ready to drop some bombs or something in that area. Someone called in and told them not to because there were friendly forces in the area.

We heard that over the radio, so, we went back in to our LZ and explained it to them, "You need to make sure, you know, that you are sending the right aircraft."

Q: Were there any casualties for you to pick up in An Nasiriyah?

A: We weren't sure, because when we got there, the medic, myself and the crew chief were the only two that got off the aircraft. It was nighttime, and we were running with the NVGs. We couldn't see any movement, but we couldn't walk too far from the aircraft,

because we didn't know what we had landed into. One of our pilots said he thought he saw some people moving around, but he wasn't sure if it was our guys or Iraqis. So we got out of there.

Later on we found out that what we were going in to get was going to be KIAs anyway. So for them to send us into a spot like An Nasiriyah during that time I felt was a pretty bad judgment call, because they thought we were a -46. I think it was going to be three or four casualties we were to pick up, but actually, we would have picked up KIAs, and it would have turned into seven or eight KIAs, because it could have been our entire crew.

Q: You had no communication with the people on the ground?

A: We had none. We were only talking to the PET team.

Q: If there had been some sort of communication with the people on the ground, and the LZ was hot, would you still go in?

A: That would have been pretty much a call by our PC. The way Mr. Bryant worked it, anything we did, if the crew as a whole didn't feel comfortable with it, we turned down the mission. He was the overall decision maker, but he got the crew involved, and if anyone felt uncomfortable, we'd all get together and sit down and talk about it and decide if we wanted to take the mission.

Our overall team leader, CW3 Barnett, pretty much put out that if a crew didn't feel comfortable, but the PIC was willing to take it, then kind of get with him as the team leader, and we'd all sit down and discuss it if time permitted. As it so happened, there was never a time that we refused a mission. Well, there was a dust storm one time that we didn't feel comfortable flying in, but other than that...

Q: If you had, let's say, a hot LZ with an urgent casualty, how would the crew react?

A: I think the three crews that I had would have taken the mission. I really believe they would have, because I had some pretty high-speed medics: Sgt. Crump, who you will be speaking with this afternoon and Sgt. Schwartz. [No interviews with these two individuals.] Personally, I think I had the best pilots in the company on my team. As far as each aircraft, I think I had the best pilots.

Q: And how would you judge the best pilot?

A: My PCs were my team leader, CW3 Barnett, plus CW2 Bryant and CW2 Wright. Barnett and Wright come from assault units, and this is their first time doing MEDEVAC. They were all level headed. They didn't make rash decisions, and they didn't get stressed out real quick. They'd stop, think about it and then react to the

mission, and they kept everyone involved. They'd ask the medic, "What do you think should be done?" And they'd ask the crew chief "What do you want to do?" I think, that's what I look at as the best pilots and their flying. They were very cautious about flying. They weren't out there like trying to be like Tom Cruise from *Top Gun*, or anything like that. They were getting the patients to where they had to be in the quickest time, along with being as safe as they could. I think all our pilots did that. I just think I had the best crews, the best pilots. Mr. Wright's crew flew over 200 hours of combat time safely.

Q: That's good. You had a crew that you were happy with. Well, how was the re-deployment back to the States?

A: The deployment back as far as medical supply was real hectic, because I had to turn in all my drugs over there, and I had to sign for my CANAs, which was my Valium, morphine and auto-injectors. I signed for them here and we took them over. Each team sergeant carried their own drugs, because they were controlled drugs. They carried them over themselves. Then I had to turn them in over there, which was kind of a nightmare, because I had to sit down and count everything by lot number, and individually separate it all to turn in.

Before the war started, we were given a bad batch of Mark 1's.

Q: That was the nerve agent auto injector?

A: Right. One of the soldiers came to me and told me his 2-PAM had self-injected. It automatically went off, which kind of made me think, "Ah, that's really not possible." I mean, it is possible, but I thought maybe the soldier was playing with it. As a couple of days went on, more and more soldiers were coming to me saying that they opened their protective mask carrier and found that their Mark 1s had self-injected themselves. So what ended up happening was I went out to Doha and spoke with MAJ Sallas, who was our medical director down there, and told him we had received a bad batch.

He said it was very lucky that I found out that it was a bad batch before we had pushed forward. Because had we pushed north and had chemical agents used on us, a lot of our guys probably would have died because their Mark 1s had self- injected.

Q: What is your overall view of the Army?

A: I'm happy with the Army. I tell a lot of people that I think I could be doing worse. I could be out working in a job somewhere, where I didn't have the benefits that I have now. After this Iraqi Freedom, it made me more proud to be in the Army, because when I joined the Army, I was in basic training during the ground war that started during Desert Storm. So I figured I'd never get to see a war, you know.

As far as being a medic, that was what I really wanted to do, to actually go to war and to be able to take care of people. Back here [at Fort Benning], all I do is run patients from hospital to hospital. I don't get to see or do a lot of trauma things. Overall, I'm happy with the Army. There's a few things I would change, very minor, but other than that, I'm happy.

Q: And what would those be?

A: The biggest thing is the regulation for flight medics receiving the CMB. Right now we're not authorized to receive the CMB. I feel that flight medics deserve it just as well as the other medics. If you did something during a conflict, you deserve that. I mean, the regulation states that if you are attached to an infantry unit, or something like that, then you can receive it. The company put in the paperwork for us to receive the CMB. I'm not sure who kicked it back, but it was kicked back.

Q: Isn't it the rule that you be attached to an infantry brigade or lower?

A: Right, infantry brigade or lower. I think with us supporting the I MEF and being the first MEDEVAC unit into Baghdad should entitle us to something. I thought that of all the MEDEVAC units in the Army, we flew the most missions. So that would probably be the one thing that I would change. With us changing over into the Whiskey [91W] field, I think everything should have changed. I figured that regulation would have changed after Desert Storm. Some of the people thought it had changed.

Q: Is there any thing else?

A: No, not really. That's my biggest gripe right now. I mean, I'm happy with my commander. He loved the team leaders and the team sergeants and everything. The platoon leaders put soldiers in for medals that they thought were really deserved, and I think everyone will be happy with them. From what I'm hearing, all of our awards went through. All of our crews are receiving air medals. Being an aviation unit, one of the highest honors for us is an air medal, and like I said, just as for a medic it is the CMB.

I have my EFMB and most of our medics have their EFMB, but the CMB would be nicer. If you are wearing a combat badge as a medic, I think you should also be wearing the CMB. You should have done something to earn it.

I'm just happy, nothing else, you know. There's not really anything else I would change. I think the Army is going in a good direction. I have seven years left, and I hope it is a real good seven years.

Q: I hope so too. Any other things you want to talk about?

A: No sir, I think that's pretty much it.

Q: SGT Givings, I appreciate your time, and thank you for sharing it with us.

A: Yes, sir.

Q: Thank you for your service.

A: Thank you, sir.

AMEDD ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM
INTERVIEW OIF 064 and OIF 065

INTERVIEW WITH
SSG BRYANT A. WILLIAMS, FLIGHT MEDIC
AND
SSG MICHAEL O. RICHARDSON, CREW CHIEF
498TH MEDICAL COMPANY (AIR AMBULANCE)

CONDUCTED BY
COL RICHARD VAN NESS GINN, USA, RET.
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA
19 AUGUST 2003

OFFICE OF MEDICAL HISTORY
OFFICE OF THE SURGEON GENERAL, U.S. ARMY/
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. ARMY MEDICAL COMMAND
FALLS CHURCH, VIRGINIA

Q: SGT Williams, tell me a little bit about yourself: where you're from, where you went to school, how you came into the Army.

A: I'm from Baltimore, Maryland, and I joined the Army in 1991. Just changed over to flight medic two years ago. Had to go to the course at Fort Rucker, Alabama, then I came to this unit. Been here in the unit almost two years in October.

Q: Were you a medic prior to that?

A: Yes. I've always been a medic.

Q: So, you were MOS 91B. Have you transitioned to 91W yet?

A: Yes sir. I transitioned over.

Q: How has that been?

A: It's pretty good, sir.

Q: What are the pluses and minuses?

A: I think it is a plus. They give the medics more experience in their field, and what they need to complete their job. So it is a plus. I don't see any negatives about it.

Q: How did you get selected for 91W training? Did you have to initiate that process yourself?

A: You initiate it yourself.

Q: How do you think it prepared you for what you were doing in Iraq?

A: Because you have some knowledge of what to expect, you actually know how to treat it and to sustain a life on a battlefield. Instead of just having the basic first aid of "A-B-C", you're able to go to "A-B-C-D" and anything else that you need to get the patient off the battlefield.

Q: Did you run into any Navy corpsmen? Could you compare the level they were at compared to where you were?

A: I think their initial training is longer and the Army is shorter, but on the Army side, once you get to your unit, that's where you pick up most of your training. They [the Navy corpsmen] just get all their training in one big lump sum right there at the beginning. That's like the biggest difference that I see.

Q: Did you have much contact with those guys in Iraq?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: Could you get an idea of how well they performed? Could you draw any comparisons?

A: No, it was really no comparison from an Army medic to a Navy corpsman. It is like the same skill level; it is just about how you go about getting to that skill level.

Q: So you think the net result is about the same?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: Did the transition training better prepare you to do your mission?

A: Yes, sir. I believe that now once a medic comes out of AIT they're already a 91W, so they won't have to go through all the different training that the Bravo had to get to transition over to 91W.

Q: Well, in a nutshell, the 91W program is taking a medic and raising it a notch. It's really an EMT isn't it?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: And you're initially qualified as EMT-I?

A: EMT-I (EMT-Intermediate) and then you have Paramedics.

Q: So you are classified as EMT-I?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: What is the difference between that and a paramedic?

A: A paramedic basically can push cardiac drugs, narcotics.

Q: If you wanted to do that, would you have to go to more classes?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: Does the Army want you to do that, or does it want you where you are?

A: I think the Army would love to have all paramedics, but it is just the cost.

Q: So, if you leave the Army, you could probably find a job.

A: Yes, you'll find a job, no problem, in the medical field.

Q: All in all, how much time have you spent in medical training in the Army?

A: The whole eleven years. I've always been in the medical field.

Q: I mean in terms of the training itself.

A: Probably half of your career. I would say training is continuous. Once you get to your unit you get training that is basically the experience of doing it and getting familiar with the different things that you are going to see on the battlefield in your MOS.

Q: How do you stay current here at Benning?

A: You have to go through refresher courses for EMT, for all your certifications.

Q: The training for the 91W is quite a process.

A: Yes, sir.

Q: What kinds of casualty situations were you involved with in Iraq?

A: I had everything, every kind of battlefield casualty you could sustain, from patients straight off the operating table with an open abdominal wound, to head injuries, amputations – just about everything that you see in the textbook version, but you actually have to go out there and see it in real life.

Q: Do you feel that you had been adequately prepared for what you faced?

A: Yes sir. Very well prepared.

Q: What were some of the toughest cases?

A: Some of the toughest were probably the head injuries. We had to bag the patient, breath for them, put them on the machine and you had to try to sustain other patients at the same time while you were doing that. So that was pretty hectic.

But as far as being prepared, you are always prepared. It is just nervousness and stress, how you think you are going to do. That's the whole point. Because you will always be well prepared, it is just how you react to a situation once you see it.

Q: How was the stress? You were pretty fast-paced.

A: Oh, it was a very fast pace. At the beginning you had no idea what to expect, and then after the first day went by you had just seen about everything there was to see, so you were more mentally prepared after that.

Q: Could you describe your first day?

A: The first day, I stayed in the NBC protective suit. Once the call came in, "They need a MEDEVAC," you just start sweating, pouring down. It was really an adrenaline rush kicking in – nervous, don't know what to expect. But then when you get your first patient, you get in there and do your quick assessment and evaluation. You see that this is something that you are prepared to handle, and that you are going to actually sustain a patient and get them to the next level quick as you can. It was very hectic the first day. It was like mission, after mission, after mission, after mission.

Q: Do you figure you saved some lives?

A: Oh yes, a whole lot of lives.

Q: Any that didn't make it that you had hopes of pulling through?

A: No, sir. I didn't see any not making it. My theory with a patient is that I'm going to do everything I can do, plus more. I don't look at it as they might not make it, even if I kind of get the idea. I'm still going to keep bagging them [resuscitating with an Ambu Bag]. I'm still going to keep treating them until I can get them to the next higher level. But I didn't look at it like, "This one might not make or that one might not make it." I was just doing what I was trained to do.

Q: While you are here at Fort Benning, do you work at the Martin Army Hospital to maintain your currency?

A: Yes, sir. We used to go up there and work at the emergency room.

SSG MICHAEL RICHARDSON (OIF 065) JOINS THE INTERVIEW

Q: SSG Michael L. Richardson is also a returnee with the 498th Medical Company. So now we've got the medic and the crew chief. Tell me about your background, SGT Richardson.

A: I'm from Saluda, South Carolina. I came in the military as a fire support specialist in field artillery. I'd been there for about three years and decided it wasn't for me; too much field time. Decided to come into aviation and ended up in the MEDEVAC at Fort

Hood, Texas. Stayed there awhile, and then came here, to MEDEVAC again. So, it's rough.

Q: Do you want to continue with MEDEVAC?

A: No. I'm going to go recruiting next year.

Q: So you have a family?

A: Yes, I'm married, with three girls.

Q: How did it go while you were gone?

A: It was OK. I missed my family a lot, you know. Just wanted to get back to them.

Q: How did your family deal with it? Did they get good support?

A: Well, my family went back to my hometown and stayed with my mother while I was gone. My wife put my daughter in school down there. She had good contact from the family support group. They called her, sent e-mail, let her know what was going on when I wasn't able to contact them. They let her know what was up with us and everything. It was pretty good support.

Q: E-mail makes a difference, doesn't it?

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: How about regular mail? Was that getting through?

A: For the most part. You know, in Iraq we didn't know what was getting through, so we got it whenever we could.

Q: Now how about when you got back home and reintegrated with the family? How has that gone?

A: Oh, that's going great. You know, some problems you might have had when you left pretty much drew you together. It made the relationship a lot stronger.

Q: That's good.

A: It has been pretty good. Can't complain at all.

Q: Do you have any idea where you will go to do recruiting duty?

A: No. No idea.

Q: Explain what you do as a crew chief. What are your responsibilities?

A: Well, pretty much maintenance. We keep it flying. Anything wrong with the aircraft, we fix it. As far as most of the inspections, we pretty much are responsible for doing the inspections with the help of the medics. Make sure we got oil and everything. We want to make sure everything is good before you go up there and try to save somebody's life.

Q: The flight crew is two in the front and two in the back?

A: Right. The medic and the crew chief in the back, two pilots in the front.

Q: What level of maintenance can you do on the helicopter? Can you pull an engine out, work on it, and re-install it?

A: Yes, we can pull the engine out, but a lot of stuff requires higher-level maintenance, civilian contract stuff. So it is pretty much always in the book. It tells you if it is unit maintenance – we're unit level maintenance. So they tell you if we are going to work on that or not.

Most of the stuff that will probably happen to the aircraft is at our level anyway. So we'll pull the engine out, replace the part on it, put it back in. But if anything is broken inside the engine or something, they have to send it off to a higher maintenance level.

Q: How long is the school that prepares you to do this?

A: Three and a half months.

Q: What's the MOS title?

A: 67T. Black Hawk helicopter repairman; UH-60 helicopter repairman.

Q: Can you take that into civilian life?

A: Yes.

Q: How would that work?

A: Just like we have here. We have Lockheed-Martin, a big civilian contractor [providing higher-level maintenance]. Most of them that did this in the military, got out, and now they're contractors. They do pretty much all the maintenance we can't do. It's pretty good money.

Q: Were you two flying together or in different aircraft?

A: It was different aircraft.

Q: Who had the better aircraft?

A: (SSG Richardson) Oh, I did, of course.

Q: From time to time, did you get involved in helping the medic on your helicopter?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Has that worked that way with you, SGT Williams?

A: Yeah, we helped them out.

Q: SGT Richardson, what was your most memorable mission?

A: Well, my medic always talked about how they had to bag a patient and give marching orders. I thought like, "Oh, that ain't nothing." Then I was on one real long flight, and my medic had me bag the guy the whole time to the hospital. My hand was getting cramps in them, like man, this is going to get hard. I respect that medic for that now, you know. It was kind of hard. And you've got that monitor you've got to watch to make sure it doesn't go up so high and so low, and you are like, "Oh man." It is pretty hectic. I respect the medics.

Q: Would you routinely get involved in loading patients in the helicopter?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: I guess it worked the same way with you, SGT Williams?

A: Yes, sir. I depend on the crew chief. Soon as we get to our pickup site, I just run out to the patient. I depend on the crew chief to prepare the helicopter and make sure the configuration is good, to decide where the patient is going to go and any equipment we need. They just get us whatever we need, right there.

Q: How was your equipment and logistics support?

A: The support system over there was pretty good. It was kind of hectic at first when no one knew just how it was going to go, and who was going to support who. But once they got going, everyone supported each other regardless of where you were from or where you were going. If you needed support you got it.

Q: SGT Richardson, when you came in, we were talking about the Marines. How was it being with the Marines?

A: It was different. I enjoyed being with them instead of being with the Army at the time. They pretty much let us be, you know. They were all, "Them's the Army guys, they cool." Anything we needed, they took care of it. "You all need water, here you go, just come and get it." So they were nice to us. If we were with the Army, it would probably have been a little different.

Q: How about you, SGT Williams?

A: Yes, the Marines are pretty good. They're just different.

Q: How are they different?

A: How they go about doing things. Their mentality – everything is totally different. All in all, the end mission was the same, but how they get there and when they are going to get there is totally different.

Q: What is their mentality?

A: "We're going to take this hill right now, straight up the middle. Don't use that trail over there. Don't use this one. Go straight right there."

Q: That hasn't changed.

A: Yes, I know. That's why they're different. That's the mentality that they have no matter what the mission will be like. They tell you, "We're going right now, regardless of what else. We don't need a thought process or anything." They just go.

Q: Did you all meet any unforgettable characters?

A: (SSG Richardson) Yes. They had some pretty good leadership over there. They were just a different mentality.

Q: What was the [Task Force] Tarawa Sergeant Major like?

A: (SSG Richardson) Oh, the Sergeant Major was really cool. He wasn't like other sergeant majors, who probably run around, barking and yelling at everybody. He was just laid back, you know. All the soldiers respected him. He just sit back and give orders from sitting down on the chair. They respected him. When he saw me, he was like, "Park yourself right here," and he just sit back in his chair like your old Dad, or something; just give orders and sit right back. Everybody respect him for that. He was real nice to everybody, wasn't yelling at nobody.

Q: You'd think just the opposite, wouldn't you?

A: (SSG Richardson) I would think the opposite – that's what Marines are made up of, all yelling and stuff. He was so laid back, talk to you, he respected you like you respected him, you know. The Army might have been different. A sergeant major can't sit there and talk to you about personal things a lot, not in a situation like that; but, you know, he was real cool. Talk about anything, like, "I can't wait to go back up there to Bojangles [a restaurant chain]." He talked about all the time going to Bojangles when he gets back home. He talked about your family, what you want to do in your career. He was real cool. You think, Marines, hard-core stuff, but he was real laid back. He was real cool.

Q: So you were supporting [Task Force] Tarawa. How was the pace of the operation? I understand that it went pretty quick.

A: (SSG Williams) Pretty fast.

Q: How about fatigue?

A: SSG Williams) Actually you didn't even think about it you just kept going until it was over.

A: (SSG Richardson) I flew a lot of night flights.

A: (SSG Williams) You don't think about it. You get tired but keep going.

Q: You kept relocating and leap-frogging forward. I understand the equipment got to be a nuisance, pulling it out and then putting back.

A: (SSG Richardson) Pulling it out, yeah.

A: (SSG Williams) We've got to move tomorrow, so you've got to pack up everything, load it in one aircraft that ain't going to be on duty for a couple hours: two crews out to set up everything while the other crew is pulling missions everywhere. It was crazy.

Q: Any lessons learned?

A: (SSG Williams) Yeah, small tents.

Q: I hear that a lot.

A: (SSG Williams) Reduce the crew equipment, because that's a waste of time. Looks pretty on paper and everything, but you need smaller, two-man support tents to go forward. Just like the Marines; every last one of them had one. And they was very

supportive. We got word, "We got tents for all of you." They gave each one of us a tent. So we slept in our tent. We no longer had to put up our big huge tent. We slept in the one-man tent they gave us. It was nice.

Q: Any other things you think ought to be done differently?

A: Differently? No, not other than the equipment.

Q: Do you think your training prepared you for what you ran into there, SGT Richardson?

A: Most of the training did, but a lot of stuff you did out there you really can't train for. You know, spur of the moment type things. You don't expect to see all this blood type stuff, people with head wounds, stuff like that. I didn't really expect all that. You really can't train up for stuff like that.

Q: Do you think you ever got used to it?

A: No, I don't think so.

Q: How about you, SGT Williams?

A: That's something you don't get used to. You deal with the situation while you are in it. You don't get used to that.

Q: Well, I promised you I wouldn't keep you past 1700. I appreciate your taking time for this. Thank you both for what you did, for being part of the operation. SGT Richardson, if you tell your grandkids years from now what you are most proud of, what would that be?

A: (SSG Richardson) When I was in the war, I had a part in saving some Marine lives, and just saving people's lives in general. Pretty cool. I wouldn't want to do it again, I never want to go back, but it was OK. Worked with different people, the British, the Marines.

A: (SSG Williams) I was with the British, too.

Q: How were the Brits?

A: (SSG Richardson) Oh they were real cool. I liked the Brits.

A: (SSG Williams) They was different, too. They take care of you.

Q: Did you learn how to drink tea?

A: (SSG Williams?) Well, not really.

A: (SSG Richardson) They like to trade. They liked our uniforms; we liked theirs better. Somebody would say, "We'll give you this for this." And we're like, "Okay."

Q: What was the main difference?

A: (SSG Richardson) Well, their main difference was the men doing their personal hygiene with females around. It is just part of their coaching to stand right there. It is no awareness of who was around, or any males around. It is just that's their culture.

Q: You mean in terms of going to the bathroom?

A: Yes.

Q: They don't bother to get behind a tree?

A: No, it don't matter to them. It's just like everyone is unity and harmony.

Q: That's interesting. I wouldn't think of that with the British.

A: (SSG Richardson) They called it Desert Flower.

Q Desert Flower?

A: They put water bottles together and dug it in the ground so it kind of set up out the ground like a urinal. They'd be in the middle of the camp or whatever, and they'd just go to it and stand over it – and the females just walking by and everything. When we first got there, it was like, "Oh boy, we in the Army and that's an EO [Equal Opportunity issue] of some kind you can get in trouble for. Girls walking by, and they stand there talking to them. Just like, oh man...I just freaked.

Q: Any other differences? How they approached the business of going to war?

A: (SSG Richardson) They was very well prepared for the mission that they was going to take. They was prepared for it. And they made sure any attachments that they had to support they took care of.

Q: Who took better care of you, the Marines or the Brits?

A: (SSG Richardson) Actually, I would say about the same. Both of them took really good care of us.

Q: How about you, SGT Williams, what would you tell your grandkids that you are most proud of?

A: I would be most proud that the entire unit made it back. Everyone came back. Then I would be proud of sustaining life on the battlefield, being part of history and doing that with the Marines.

Q: I appreciate your time, both of you. And thank you for what you did.

AMEDD ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM
INTERVIEW OIF 070

INTERVIEW WITH
SPC ROBERT J. DAHLEN
498TH MEDICAL COMPANY (AIR AMBULANCE)

CONDUCTED BY
COL RICHARD VAN NESS GINN, USA, RET.
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA
20 AUGUST 2003

OFFICE OF MEDICAL HISTORY
OFFICE OF THE SURGEON GENERAL, U.S. ARMY/
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. ARMY MEDICAL COMMAND
FALLS CHURCH, VIRGINIA

Q: I am with SPC Robert Dahlen, who was a crew chief in Iraq. SPC Dahlen, tell us a little bit about yourself, where you're from, went to school.

A: I am 22 years old. I am from Rancho Cucamonga, California.

Q: Wow.

A: Yeah, a lot of people don't believe that. "You're making that up." I joined the Army when I was 18. I wanted to fly, I wanted to be a pilot, but I didn't want to go through college and then straight into flying. I wanted to get the background, get the mechanics down. So I decided to become a crew chief, get the mechanics down and then put in my pack and go to flight school. I haven't got to that point yet. I haven't put up my packet yet.

Q: Do you intend to do that?

A: Oh, yes. More and more, I go to work and I see the rest of us, crew chief-wise and the mechanics, turning wrenches and whatnot and making the money we do, and then I take a look at the pilots and their lifestyle, and one can't help but wonder, it's got to be a better quality of life. We both get to fly, but they get paid a little more and a lot less stress, I'd say. So, yes, I'd like to do that.

Q: Well, that's an opportunity.

A: Oh, yes, definitely. I just got married a year ago. I just celebrated my first anniversary.

Q: Congratulations.

A: Appreciate it.

Q: Do you all live on post?

A: No, we actually live in the Phenix City, over there in Alabama. She wants me to stay in. She wants me to re-enlist.

Q: Is she from this area?

A: Well, she is from two hours south of here. She's from Thomasville, Georgia. She's new to this whole military scene, too. She's only 20, you know. This is the first time she's ever been out of her city, you know, since she met me. So I kind of took her away from her home. She wants me to stay in for the benefits for when we have children.

Q: It is a genuine benefit.

A: Yes. Definitely.

Q: It truly is. And you appreciate it more as time goes on and you see what's happening.

A: Oh, yes. Yes. I'm not saying we're poor right now. I make decent money, but it would just help later on when we do decide to have children, to have the extra help. And she's taken care of, too, by the Army, so you can't complain about the benefits. People make jokes about benefits in the Army, but it is really not bad. I have no complaints.

I've been in since 1999. I went through AIT at Fort Eustis, Virginia. I left there February 2001 and went to Korea for a year. I enjoyed my tour there.

Q: Who were you with?

A: I was with 2-2 Aviation, out of Camp Stanley. I was in the Air Maintenance Platoon. I had the option of going to a flight platoon, but I wanted to get my mechanical knowledge down. So I wanted to stay down there with the maintenance guys and get some knowledge of the airplane.

So I spent a year just being a maintainer, turning wrenches and whatnot. I left there, got orders for Fort Benning and came here. Then I went to the 11th Infantry Regiment Flight Attachment, which supports the Ranger school, OCS, Pathfinders, all the way up in Dahlonega, and all the way down in Florida with aviation support for the Ranger Schools. That was nice to get the air assault training, loading in Rangers, loading them out, giving them the briefs, crew briefs in case of emergency and whatnot.

Q: So Ranger School looked like a lot of fun?

A: Not for me. It was just not my lifestyle. I'll tell you what. I just walked through the woods hungry for a week and said, "This isn't my forte." I like my back and I like my knees and I want to keep them intact.

Q: They don't offer a correspondence course?

A: Yes, I wish, you know. When I first started looking into coming into the Army, I thought about the length of training. My older brother is in the Army, and he advised me, "I know you and I know it is not you." So I listened to him, and went with my heart and went aviation.

But I was down at DOT. Like I said, they did the aviation training courses for the schools. One of the soldiers here in the 498th – his wife was diagnosed with leukemia and he was looking for a way out [of going to Iraq] to stay back with her. So when I found out, I told him I'd volunteer to take his place.

So I came up here and took his place and went to Kuwait, while he took my place down there at DOT. Did our little thing in the desert, came back and decided I wanted to stay with this company. They were going to switch us back, and I was like, "Nah, I don't want to." I like the mission; I think it is very admirable and honorable.

Q: How about the flying experience there?

A: Real, real mixed emotions. I mean, it is an awesome sensation to be out there flying and doing real war mission. At the same time, you've got it in the back of your head, you know, "This is dangerous. This is the most dangerous position you can be in. You're vulnerable." We're not armed, other than one M-16 and a couple of 9 millimeters.

Q: Who were the members of your crew?

A: Being in the Area Support Team, it was kind of like a big pool of crew chiefs and medics and pilots. We weren't necessarily assigned to crews, but for the main part we tried to keep them all together because we are on 24-hour schedules so we kind of wanted to keep crews together. Although it didn't happen too often, it did most of the time, and my pilot was Christopher Riley, CW3 Christopher Riley. Our other pilot was Mr. Butch Armstrong, and my medic was SSG James, Christopher James. We were on aircraft 415 for the most part.

Q: You were doing an area support mission.

A: Yes. We were in Kuwait, in Ali Al Salem, while all of our forward teams were up north, doing their mission with the Marines.

While we had three forward support teams up in Iraq supporting the Marines, the ASMT covered all of Kuwait all the way up north near Nasiriyah, Numaniyah, pretty much behind the forward support team. We were doing mainly blood missions (blood runs, taking a supply of blood up to hospitals), patient transfers – taking them from the CSH units up north, down to Kuwaiti International Hospital.

We were also doing patient transfers from CSH to CSH, from up in Iraq to Baghdad and Kuwait. Not necessarily down to the Kuwaiti International Hospital, but vice versa. We were hauling EPWs, from Incuzar, that's where the prisoner of war camp was, and bringing them back down to the hospitals.

Q: Was that in Kuwait?

A: No, it was actually on the border, right at the border of Kuwait and Iraq, on the Gulf. That was dangerous. There was a 2,500 foot tower that wasn't lit up, so if you were going in there at night and didn't know where it was, it would creep up on you, and scare you a little bit.

The biggest concern out there was the towers and the wires, because they are not lit and they'll grab you, because we like to keep low for safety purposes. It is a lot harder to shoot something low and fast than high and slow. So we tried to keep low, but if we knew there was wires and towers out there, we'd adjust. Sometimes they'd just reach out and grab you, or try to. Thank God we didn't have any incidents though.

Q: Did you have any close calls?

A: I remember one night specifically, I have it written down, that we had a call for a patient transfer, pick him up from Alpha Surgical Hospital, which was up near Nasiriyah. I remember it was like ten o'clock at night, completely black, dust storms were high, and visibility was really low. We took off. We were just hauling all the way up there going 160 knots, and we crossed through into Iraq. About ten minutes into Iraq, we hear the "beep, beep, beep," and the pilot, Mr. Riley, said "We have missiles at seven o'clock."

I get out of my seat and I'm looking around; I'm trying to find this thing, and I just see this flash of red fire off in the distance, and it just disappeared, just gone. Don't know what happened to it, don't care, all I know is it didn't come get us.

Evasively, Mr. Riley had taken us down and put us pretty much on the ground trying to outrun the missile or whatever it was chasing us. That was the most scared I've been from munition work, I should say.

Q: Did you have protective systems, like chaff?

A: No, it didn't come to that point. Thank God, though. I don't want to say it was uneventful, but the biggest concern we had was we had one surface to air missile either locked on us or in the vicinity, and that shook us up. Whether it was his [Mr. Riley's] flying or the missile just lost track, it didn't come much closer than 500 yards.

The worst flying conditions were during dust storms, and those would sneak up on you. You would not be able to see anything. Couldn't see the ground, couldn't see the stars: under NVGs it would just be green, nothing but green, and the pilots had to fly on their instruments. We'd be useless in the back, me and the medics, because we weren't able to see any aircraft outside, or the ground or stars or any visual reference points. So we were just pretty much flying blind.

They cranked up, got above it and finally got visual references, but when we came out, we were almost sideways because it disorients you. You have no idea where you are, how fast you are going, or how far off the ground you are. It is a little disconcerting, too.

Q: Was this daytime?

A: That was night time. Usually most of our missions were during the night time, which was the worst time to fly, but the best time for avoiding conflict, because it is a lot easier to hide in the night time than it is in the daytime. But for flying it is the worst.

Q: And that's what you were doing.

A: That's what we were doing. I want to say we had, me personally, my crew, maybe had probably 20 or 30 missions, mainly hauling patients out of Iraq, hauling blood up there to supply them, and picking up EPWs.

We picked up two children once. They weren't prisoners, but they were Iraqi nationals. One of them was seventeen years old and one of them was like a year and a half, and they both got shrapnel. The poor child had shrapnel in his head with paralysis on the left side of his body, and will for the rest of his life. That was hard.

We took them back down to Kuwait City, and took them to the hospital so they could be worked on down there. That was hard seeing those kids hurt, you know. It is one thing to be picking up your own guys, or picking up enemy casualties, but it is another thing to be picking up innocent bystanders and especially children. Kind of chokes you up a little bit.

Q: Who were you all living with?

A: We were living with the 1st Marine Division at Ali Al Salem. Ali Al Salem was separated between the Air Force and everybody else. The Air Force kind of likes to keep to themselves and leave us bastard stepchildren outside the gates of their little comfort zone. They'd allow us up to the rock, they liked to call it, where they had a PX, swimming pools and nice chow hall, while the Army, the Marines and the Navy guys all slept down in the sand box in nasty tents.

Q: Is that what they called the Snake Pit?

A: That's the Snake Pit. But it was a sand box. It was just nothing but sand.

Q: How were the Marines?

A: Oh, they were great. You know, real supportive. We had no problems. You hear a lot of competitiveness between the branches of service, but not when it comes like this, because we were all in the same team. We all had outstretched arms to each other. We supported them and they supported us, and we were a happy family.

Q: Did you see a difference in the in the Army and Marine cultures?

A: Oh yeah. The Marines are a little more – I don't want to say professional, because that's not the term I'm looking for – but a lot more geared to go, I want to say. Just ready to go.

Our small company had such a different schedule at times, because we always had crews on 24-hour duty, we had crews up north, and we were kind of in disarray. For the most part, we kind of kept to ourselves and had a little more lax atmosphere, just relax when you are off but work hard when you are on.

But the Marines were 24/7 go. They were always on go. They got burned out a lot though. I actually had a chance to talk to a few of them, and they were just burned out.

Q: And these were guys who were stationed with you?

A: Right.

Q: What kind of jobs did they have?

A: We had Marine helicopter mechanics working on CH-46s, Hueys, and Cobras. And there was Navy Seabees, I think they are called. They were engineers; they built stuff for the Navy: bridges and roads and whatnot.

Q: These guys that were burned out, were they helicopter maintenance guys?

A: Yeah. Those guys, like I said, were nonstop. Our maintenance guys would work from like six o'clock in the morning to five or six o'clock at night, and if there wasn't any work to do, you know, go back to your tent. But usually there was work to do.

But the Marine guys, there was always at least 200 people in the hangar working and being busybodies just nonstop. Of course, they had three times more aircraft than we did, but they were always in there; tired looks on their faces, but not slowing down. Not slowing down, they were always on the go. Always. Good bunch of guys. I was real proud to be working with them.

Q: How was the deployment for your wife?

A: Oh, she was a wreck. We'd only been married six months, and when I told her that I had volunteered, she kind of took it as I was leaving her, you know, I was abandoning her. She didn't quite understand that I was trying to be the good guy here. I was trying to help somebody out. I saw an opportunity to help somebody and his wife, on top of the fact that we'd be making a little extra money – you know, first year married, you can always use a little more money. And just to be doing something good. But she didn't quite see that.

She was really afraid for me. She was real scared, and it took her about four months while I was over there to finally come around. She was having problems dealing with me being gone. It was our first time apart.

Q: Was she also angry about it, maybe?

A: Yes, she was angry with me because I guess she felt like –

Q: You left.

A: Well, originally our orders were for a whole year. When I told here I would be gone for a year, there goes our first anniversary, there goes our first married Christmas together, and everything would just be shut down for a year between her and me. She was real worried about that, that it would affect our marriage.

I was afraid that it would take a toll on her. It did for the first couple of months, but she finally came around and saw it was going to be OK, especially when I told her that I was coming home so soon, and not exceed that year that we were supposed to be there. Then she was a little more at ease, comforted. She is a great girl.

Q: And how has it worked since you got back?

A: Oh, we're great. We're actually doing our honeymoon/anniversary cruise of the Bahamas in three days.

Q: Well, have a good time.

A: We will. Much needed leave. Everybody took block leave when we got back, but not me. I just stuck around and worked while everybody did that just so I could make sure that I can go on leave next week for our cruise.

Q: That's good.

A: Yeah, I'm ready.

Q: How about family support by Fort Benning or the unit?

A: Actually we did get a lot of support from one of our soldier's churches, SGT Lockinett. He was our section sergeant over there, E-6, and his church sent a couple hundred boxes of goodies, ranging from plastic razors, to tampons, food, to everything, playing cards; just anything that you could possibly need or want for a little bit of comfort, they would send it. We got sunglasses. And he'd pass them out to everybody, bring out brown boxes, and it was great to know that people cared.

My wife was always sending me mail, her family was. My extended family would send cards and boxes and enough supplies to pass out. We'd get rolls of toilet paper that we'd just hand to people – and baby wipes. Baby wipes, everybody sent baby wipes. Oh my God, baby wipes were everywhere. People were just getting them and throwing them away because we just go so many baby wipes. It was incredible. But it worked out because we had so much supply of tooth brushes, tooth paste, soap, we'd take it down in the hangar and put it in the middle, because we shared that hangar with the Marines, and the Marines would walk by and we'd put a sign out there, "Take what you want or donate what you don't." We'd pass the supplies out to anybody and everybody.

It was great. Everybody was comfortable, as much as you could be in the desert in 130 degrees. Everybody was happy to get mail. That was the happiest point for us while we were over there.

Q: How long did it take to get a letter over there?

A: About two or three weeks. It was horrible, but the good thing is that we had a phone. We had a phone and we were fortunate enough to have the morale phone. We got fifteen minutes a day – or at a time, I should say. We had to keep it open because it was also used for missions but you got fifteen minutes to call home. If anybody was in line, you just walked to the back if you still wanted to use it, but if not, you just hung up and then call right back.

The fifteen-minute thing was mainly because they wanted to keep the lines open, so after fifteen minutes a little red flag would go up through the communications network that they were abusing the morale lines, so we'd hang up at fifteen minutes and usually call back if no one was in line. It was real great to be able to talk to family.

It was a little less fortunate for the guys up north, because they'd go for a couple months without being able to have a phone conversation with a wife or loved one, but for the rest of us stuck down in Kuwait, in Ali Al Salem, we were able to use the phone frequently. That was nice.

Q: Do you think your training had prepared you for what you encountered?

A: For flying, yes. For the MEDEVAC, no. Because like I said, this is my first dealing with MEDEVAC, and I had no clue. No idea how it works. I had no idea what my job was, what I was supposed to do, if I was supposed to help out with the medical part, with the medic and the patient.

It wasn't until I got over there and sat down with some of the medics – and we had little classes, they walked me through the crew brief on how to load patients into the carousel and it was systematic. We had a kind of a crash course on combat life saving: stick an IV, just basic stuff, a recap of things we've learned from basic, or simple first aid.

It was the first time I flew with external tanks, you know the big fuel pods. I hit my head a couple of times on those things, because I wasn't used to them. It was my first time flying in the desert. The unit went through NTC at Fort Irwin, and I think they go once a year. But, I've never been, so I had no experience flying in the desert. So I was kind of walking into this a little blind, but happy.

I tried to put my best foot forward and tried to learn as much as I can. I did, I learned a lot. You know, my first MEDEVAC mission was over there during the war. So I was prepared for my job, but my secondary job of assisting the medic and whatever else was needed, I worked on that and hopefully I got that down.

Q: How was that experience of assisting the medic?

A: It made me feel good. It made me feel like I was helping somebody, and that was a good thing. The first time I was helping somebody we picked up seven guys that walked into a minefield, a bunch of Navy guys. Two of them had lost their legs and three or four of them had a bunch of shrapnel, just miserable guys. Initially when we went up there to pick them up, we had no room for them all. We only had room for four litter patients in the litter pans [of the carousel], and two ambulatory patients, able to sit down in our seats. They were mobile, they can move for themselves, but just a little, they were hurt. So we had seven patients, but there is only six spots.

So one of my pilots said, "Well, let's run half of them down to Kuwait and we'll come up and get the other guys." I told him "I don't think that's a good idea, sir." And he said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, if I was in their shoes I wouldn't want to be split up right now, I'd want to stay with my guys." I said, "Get them in and we'll work something out."

So we got four litter patients laying down. Me and the medic gave up our seats, our crew seats, and I took a cargo strap and strapped one guy sitting down with his back against the wall, just to give him a seat.

Q: You could tie them on the hood.

A: Yeah, put a bike rack on the back. No, but that is pretty much what I did. I tied him to the aircraft inside. It was kind of a makeshift seat. Probably it wasn't the best idea, but we got them out of there at one time, and took them all down there, because they all worked together and I just didn't feel comfortable splitting these guys up. It was just a good feeling, crouched down in the middle of a Black Hawk, uncomfortable because I didn't have a seat, legs cramping, but I looked up and I saw somebody sitting in my seat who needed to sit down and it was a good feeling. I'm doing something that is important. I am doing something that helps. That's a good feeling.

Q: That's good. Any lessons learned from your experience, for yourself or the Army?

A: Pretty much don't take life for granted, because even though I was only down in the ASMT, I still was down in Kuwait, you know, and there was a few times where I felt like I wasn't going to make it. We were getting shot at, we almost crashed the helicopter. It is just so sudden, you know.

Cherish what you've got back here. I didn't realize that I was leaving my wife like that. I didn't realize that was leaving my world behind to go, ultimately almost dying for my country. Or for somebody else for their country. And to be honest, I had no problem with that. I just wasn't ready for it at that time. It didn't process through my head until I was actually there, and I said, "Man, this is the real stuff. This isn't Desert Storm, when I was back in junior high and watching it on TV. I'm here now. I'm helping, and I'm in the middle of this, and there's no glory. You know what I'm saying.

Q: This ain't Kansas, Dorothy!

A: Exactly. Because nobody is safe. Everybody has a dangerous position. It is a dangerous job, but if you know what you're doing, you've got the proper training, you'll make it through. I've had good training, good leadership, and a lot of knowledge of my job. So has everybody else here, and we all made it home. So I'm happy for us. I'll be happy when everybody else gets home safe.

Q: Well, thanks a lot. Have you got anything else you want to talk about?

A: No. I hope I was able to help you.

Q: I appreciate the effort and thank you for what you did.

A: No problem. Anytime. Take care now.

Q: Thank you for sharing this today.

AMEDD ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM
INTERVIEW OIF 069

INTERVIEW WITH
SPC MICHAEL S. TILLEY
498TH MEDICAL COMPANY (AIR AMBULANCE)

CONDUCTED BY
COL RICHARD VAN NESS GINN, USA, RET.
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA
20 AUGUST 2003

OFFICE OF MEDICAL HISTORY
OFFICE OF THE SURGEON GENERAL, U.S. ARMY/
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. ARMY MEDICAL COMMAND
FALLS CHURCH, VIRGINIA

Q: Today is 20 August 2003, and I am talking to SPC Michael Tilley, who was a crew chief in Iraq. Tell us a little bit about yourself, where you are from, where you went to school.

A: I am from Kennesaw, Georgia and I went to North Cobb High School. I joined the Army about two years after high school.

Q: Why did you join the Army?

A: I couldn't find a very good job back home, and decided to do something different. I would be taken care of in the Army, so that's what I did.

Q: How did you end up in the helicopter business?

A: At first when I was going to join, I wanted to be in the infantry and all that stuff. Then my family kind of talked me out of doing that. My brother-in-law was a Ranger, and when he got out, he had a hard time finding a job. He didn't have any job skills. So they said do something where you can at least have job skills when you get out. So I decided to work on helicopters.

Q: How was your training?

A: It was pretty good. I think the school was a pretty good school.

Q: Was the title "helicopter repairman"?

A: Yes.

Q: How long was the course?

A: It was real overcrowded when I went there, so I waited almost three months to start class. But once class started, I think it was four months of class, something like that.

Q: Was that at Fort Rucker?

A: It is at Fort Eustis, Virginia. It was a pretty good school. They teach you the basics and then you get out and you get to your unit, and a lot of the stuff you have to learn just from doing it and seeing it and having other people teach you, because there is so much. These helicopters are so complicated and they are so complex. I mean, you can't fit everything into sixteen weeks.

Q: Do you get involved with all the rebuild work that is going on here in the hangar?

A: We've been out there. We pretty much tore those things apart and had to clean all of them. Of course, they are filled with sand from being in the desert so we had to clean all

the sand out, you know, just clean them up. We were trying to fix everything that was wrong with them, to get them back to where they were before we left.

Q: It looks like contract technicians are working in the hangar.

A: Some of the guys are. Some of them are Lockheed – I believe that's who they still work for. We had Lockheed contracted with us before we left. I heard their contract ran out, but I guess it got renewed and they are back here with us now. They are here all the time. Even when we are not deploying, they are always here to help us out and give us a hand.

Q: Do you also work with them? For example, all the aircraft that they've got disassembled out there – are you working on those too?

A: Oh, I'm down there working on the helicopters. Usually they keep Lockheed guys though. If a helicopter has to be repaired they'll give it to them. They'll have their guys doing a project, and we'll do another project. But every now and then we'll cross over and help each other and work together.

Q: As military guys, can you do about the same thing they can, or do they get more advanced?

A: They get more advanced than we do. We could do the same things, but they've got more tools, their own personal tools that they go out and spend a lot of money on, and stuff like that. So they usually do more advanced stuff than we do.

Q How about maintenance in Iraq? What was available to you?

A: Not much. I had a toolbox with socket wrenches, screwdrivers, stuff like that, and that's about it. Maybe some duct tape, or something. We worked with pretty much the bare minimum tools out there.

Q: And what happened when big things happened? Was that still your responsibility?

A: Yes. We tried. Hopefully nothing big broke. I got pretty lucky. I didn't have too many major mechanical things go wrong, but when it did, they'd try to fix it. If not, they'd try to get an aircraft that was back in the rear to bring us a part up or something. If we needed special tools, we'd tell them what we needed and they'd bring that up to us. Then we'd just do it right there in the middle of the desert – change stuff out. And if it couldn't be changed out, we'd get it to where we could fly it back to the rear and just swap aircraft if we had to.

Q: What's the biggest repair you had to do?

A: I didn't really have anything really big. I had to pull a starter off one time and change a landing light where we had landed and hit a pile of sand, and it busted our landing light. Just little things like that we would have to do out there.

Q: I understand that windscreens went pretty fast.

A: I didn't have a problem with those. I started seeing a lot of other people's bust, so I took one of the green medical blankets that we had and I'd hang that across the windshield when we were on the ground, because you are out there with the sand and the rocks and stuff everywhere and these other helicopters flying in and out. They'd throw rocks up into the windshields and break them.

Q: They weren't breaking while they were in flight; they were breaking on the ground?

A: Most of them were getting cracked on the ground, and then as you'd fly it would just get worse and worse, and you'd have to go and get them changed out. But, you know, some of us saw that it was happening so we started hanging blankets up over the windows to pad it from the rocks, and that seemed to help a good bit.

Q: How are these helicopters to work on? I mean, are they work friendly or work tough?

A: They are pretty good. They don't like the desert. They don't like the sand, but I think overall we got pretty lucky. Nothing really bad happened. They are good helicopters.

Q: Are they easy to work on in terms of getting accessibility to parts?

A: Most of it is pretty easy to work on. Some of it is kind of hard. It is like anything, like a car or anything else. There's always going to be those parts that you've got to change out that are hard to get to, and they are a pain to do. But for the most part they are pretty simple. They are pretty easy to work on.

Q: Is a starter hard to get at?

A: Not really. Not the one I had to change, it was on the right side engine, so it was right there in front of me, and I could get to it.

Q: How was it working with the Marines?

A: They weren't bad. They don't have MEDEVAC, so I think at the very beginning they didn't really know what to do with us. We were assigned to them and the next thing I know it was, "Okay, come on." But they didn't really know how to use us out there.

After the first couple of days they realized, "Hey, we can call these guys and they can jump in there, and our other helicopters could be out doing other things instead of worrying about picking up wounded." So that's what they started doing.

They were pretty good. They were real friendly because they we talked to each other and tried to work out any problems or anything.

Q: Did you deal with their crew chiefs? Did you get to meet some of them over there?

A: I met some of them. We were busy so much, we didn't have much time to talk. But a few times they would walk over and talk to us or we'd walk over and look at their helicopters and talk to them and stuff.

Q: I understand they liked the Black Hawk.

A: Especially the guys that were in the camp, because the Marines don't have Black Hawks like we do. So a lot of the guys, especially ones that don't see a lot of helicopters, were always out there looking at them. "Is this like from the movie, *Black Hawk Down*?"

They liked to come out and look around. Also, they don't have MEDEVAC, so they were always curious about what we do. So we talked to them. If we had time, we'd stand there and talk to them, show them the aircraft and stuff.

Q: How would you compare the Marines and the Army from your experience?

A: Not a whole lot of difference, but some. I think the Army is a little more laid back than the Marines are, a little bit. But the Marines work hard. Those guys were working hard. I do remember that. They were always out there working. We worked too, but they would work some long hours, and they were pretty good about it. They were good.

Q: How was it for you being with Dustoff? You could be assigned to any kind of aviation unit, and this was something different.

A: I liked the mission we were doing, because I got to see where we were helping a lot of people. That's a good thing, you know, saving these people's lives.

But sometimes I saw the Marines come in their Hueys that had machine guns hanging out of them. They were talking about the missions they were doing, and I thought, "Man, I wish I was with another kind of unit and did that." But I liked what I was doing, too. It's a good feeling to be able to go in there and know that people are happy to see you every time you land. That's a good feeling.

Q: Who was in your crew?

A: It was myself; my medic was SSG Givings, my PIC was CW2 Bryant, and my PI was CW2 Mallech.

Q: Did you get to be a medic, too?

A: I'd help out with loading patients and watching patients. SGT Givings was the medic, so he did most of that stuff, but I would help out if he needed help: mostly just small things like making sure IV bags don't get too low on fluid, or watching somebody to make sure nothing is wrong, that they are not throwing up or bleeding profusely or something. That's the main things, but I helped a lot in the loading and unloading process, too.

Q: What was your most memorable experience?

A: There's a lot of them. One thing I'll never forget is all the dust storms over there were insane, especially when we got up into Iraq and the war was going on. I think it was about two weeks into the war, and everybody just got stuck. All the helicopters were on the ground; the convoys couldn't roll anymore. Nothing could move in the dust storms. We just sat in our helicopter all day and the wind was blowing. We thought a couple of times we were going to get blown over, the wind was so hard. You couldn't see past the rotor blades because the dust was just so thick and I'll never forget that. That was pretty memorable.

Q: That was not a fun day.

A: No, not really. There are so many things I remember. Flying into An Nasiriyah one night, we flew as flares were going off and there were bombs going off all around us. We got out of the helicopter trying to find I guess it was a KIA, Marine. None of the Marines wanted to move because the enemy was right there and they were right there. They didn't know where each other was, so they didn't want to move and give away their position. But we were trying to find our patient.

That was a little bit scary that night, because we were like sitting ducks coming in there, because the illumination flares were going off and we were silhouetted in the sky. I remember that because I was pretty scared that night going in.

Q: How about flying in dust clouds? I understand you guys got to look out for things.

A: Yes, that wasn't fun. It is weird, because you'd be flying and it would be clear blue sky, and then all of a sudden you are in the middle of a dust cloud and you can't see anything. You are starting to lose sight of the ground, which is bad in a helicopter. You've got dynamic rollover and things like that. That's your reference, you know, the ground, so you don't roll the helicopter, or hit the ground or anything.

The wind was real strong, and I remember one of the pilots yelling to the other one, "Hey, you need to come down." And he said, "I've got the collective," which makes you go up and down. He said, "I've got the collective, bottom down." We were climbing and the wind was blowing us straight up in the air. Then it would stop and all of a sudden we would start falling, so he'd have to yank the collective up to keep us from hitting the ground. It was pretty nerve wracking, because I'm in the back and I have no control over it, you know. I'm just trying to watch out for any obstacles that are out there. We are pretty low to the ground and there's a lot of wires and stuff out there.

It makes you nervous. You just try not to think about what could happen. You just try to keep an eye out and think, "It's OK. We'll be fine. These guys know what they are doing up front, and I know what I'm doing back here."

Q: What were your day-to-day responsibilities as a crew chief?

A: We'd jump every morning, it seemed like. So, we'd have to get up and get our helicopters ready, and then move to our next site where we were going to stay the night.

In terms of getting ready in the morning, I'd get up and go over the aircraft, check it basically from nose to tail to make sure nothing was broken and everything was how it was supposed to be, and clean it. I'd try to go through it with a paint brush every day and just clean the dirt and dust off so it didn't get too thick in the hydraulic decks and the engines and things like that. Then we'd pack all our gear up into the aircraft and move.

That was pretty much what we did just about every morning. Get up and do that. Keep all the log books straight, forms and records and things, because even though some of the inspections we didn't do during wartime, we still had forms, flight packs and things we had to keep in order and keep track of – hours and stuff like that.

Q: What would cause you the most problems in terms of routine maintenance?

A: We keep a lot of records on a laptop computer, and probably one of the hardest things was keeping that thing charged up, so I could get into it and see what needed to be done.

Besides that, just keeping the aircraft clean, because that is the big thing. I got up there very day and cleaned it off. If we'd go fly, we had nighttime shift; we were doing most of our missions at night, so the next morning I'd get up and the thing would be covered in dirt and dust again. So I just tried to keep it dusted off every day, because I figured that way, it won't get clogged up and maybe nothing will break as fast if I keep it clean, or somewhat cleaned up, as much as I can.

That's probably the two main things, keeping that laptop charged up and keeping the thing clean. I mean, there was nothing we could do out there. Sometimes we'd get a

generator; we'd go find the Marines and plug into their generator or something. Probably one of our biggest problems was finding a power source to charge that thing.

Q: Is the laptop a standard thing? Does every Black Hawk have it?

A: Yes.

Q: Couldn't you use a power converter?

A: We have converters that go in the helicopters and change the power over to where we could plug it in. You could change it to 110 power and plug laptops and medical equipment or whatever into it. For some reason, I guess they didn't get packed up when we left to go over there, so we got there and didn't have the converters. Or we couldn't find them or something, because we had maybe 20 MILVANs full of stuff, and we didn't find the converters.

Eventually I did get what they call pigtail, which was a short cord, like a Cannon plug. It plugs into the ceiling of the Black Hawk, and you can charge your laptop on that. Basically, it does the same thing as a converter but just plugs right into the ceiling. I was charging the laptop a lot, but the helicopter has to be running for that to work.

Q: That's another little problem.

A: Yes.

Q: Are you married?

A: I'm single. No kids, nothing like that.

Q: So your deployment and coming back didn't have those complications.

A: No, not like that. My Mom and my step dad came down here when we got back and they saw me and everything, but as far as a wife and kids, nothing like that. As far as that goes, I was kind of glad to be gone, because I was getting paid tax-free money over there, and I came back with a lot of money in my bank account. I went out and got a car when I got back.

Q: Of course.

A: So that was a good thing for me. I saw that for a lot of my friends, it was hard for them because of their family. I had a lot of friends whose wives had babies while they were gone. They couldn't be there for that. I was glad I didn't have to deal with that stuff.

Q: How has coming back worked out for you and for most of the people you know?

A: I think it has been good. Everybody is real glad to be back and just trying to get everything repaired, like what we're doing out there. You've seen all the helicopters torn apart. We've been working pretty hard.

We came back and we had about two weeks where we weren't working real hard. We had some classes, basically about stress management and coming back from a combat zone.

We did those for about two weeks, and then most of the company went on leave for about two weeks. As soon as we got back from that, we had to go pick up our helicopters. The day we came back off leave, we went and picked our helicopters up from the port and started bringing them back. We've been working pretty hard since then.

Q: What kind of shape were those birds in when you picked them up?

A: Well, we picked them up from Charleston, South Carolina. Some of them got flown to Savannah because they are doing the same thing over there. They've got different teams.

They were pretty beat up. Most of them were beat up and had flown a lot more than they should have been flown in that short period of time.

Q: You had some work to do so they could fly back here, I guess.

A: Some of them, yes. Most of them were good enough where we could crank them up and fly them to where they needed to go; either from Charleston to Savannah or Charleston back here. But there was a couple we had to do some work on, to get them going again. I didn't really get into it. Again, we had civilian contractors out there helping us do all that, too.

Q: Since you worked on them all the time, did you ever try flying them a little bit?

A: I haven't yet. The most I've done is hold the controls on the ground when we were doing maintenance stuff. One of my maintenance test pilots in Korea used to let me do that sometimes. So I'd hold the controls. It is pretty fun, but as far as flying, I don't really get much of a chance to, because any time it takes off you have to have two pilots up front. It's a two-pilot aircraft.

I've thought about putting a flight pack in to be a warrant officer and go to flight school, but I don't know if I want to. I haven't decided if I want to stay in the Army that long, or what I want to do. So, I'm still thinking about it.

Q: If you stay in the Army in your current MOS, do you think you would like to stay with aviation maintenance?

A: Maybe, I don't know. We'll see.

Q: Are a lot of the guys who have this maintenance contract former military?

A: A lot of them are. I don't know how many, but most of them are former military guys. Some of them were not actually in aviation, though. Some of them came over from apprenticeship programs and things like that. But most of them did what I do at some point in the military.

We've also got civilian contractors that do sheet metal and avionics, which is like radios and flight equipment and stuff that they did in the military. I'd say probably 90 percent of those guys were military before they came over here.

Q: Years from now, what would you say was your major contribution?

A: Probably keeping the aircraft together enough to go save all those people, because I think we did a good thing. I think we did a good job out there. It wasn't fun, but that's what we trained for, that's our job, and that's why we all signed up.

Q: Can you think of any lessons learned in terms of your job or in terms of what the Army ought to do?

A: I don't know. It is hard to say, because if it happens again, we might not be in a desert, we might be in a jungle somewhere, or up in the mountains where it is really cold or something. So, it is hard to say.

As far as the environment, I don't know. As far as the deployment, I think if anything needs to be changed it is way above my level. I don't know; I just do my job. If they say go, I go, and that's it. And once we get there I work. But as far as what we did, I think it went pretty good, as well as it could.

Q: Well, welcome home.

A: Thank you. Thank you.

Q: Thanks for what you did.

A: No problem.

Q: And thanks for being here today. I appreciate that.

A: Okay.

ACRONYM/WORD LIST

1st Air Cav	1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, Texas; in Vietnam was designated the 1st Air Cavalry Division (Airmobile).
1st MEF	1st Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF), the three-star headquarters for all Marine units in Iraq. An MEF is the largest Marine task force; consists of a full division, force service support group, and a Marine aircraft wing.
2-2 Aviation	2d Battalion, 2d Aviation Regiment, 2d Infantry Division
2-PAM	2-PAM (pralidoxime) chloride auto injector, nerve agent antidote (See Mark 1)
3d MEDCOM	3d Medical Command, Army Reserve unit from Fort Gillem, Georgia; two-star headquarters in OIF for Army medical units at echelons above corps
9-mil	9mm semi-automatic pistol
15P	Flight Operations Specialist
19D	Cavalry Scout
36th Engineers	36th Engineer Group, Fort Benning, Georgia
44th Med Bde	44th Medical Brigade, Fort Bragg, North Carolina
50-cal	.50 caliber machine gun
67T	Helicopter Repairer
91B	Medical Specialist; previous MOS for combat medics
91C	Practical Nurse
91W	Health Care Specialist, enlisted MOS that replaced 91B and 91C in 2001; also referred to as combat medic
93P	See 15P
101st	101st Airborne Division (Air Assault)
507th Maint	507th Maintenance Company; Army unit caught in an ambush at An Nasiriyah on 23 March 2003; 11 soldiers were killed, 6 taken prisoner, 16 escaped. One soldier, PFC Jessica Lynch, seriously injured in the attack and taken prisoner, was rescued from a Nasiriyah hospital in a celebrated rescue by special operations forces 8 days later.
1042d	1042d Medical Company (Air Ambulance), Oregon National Guard

A

AAR	After Action Report
AASF	Army Aviation Support Facility
ADVON	Advanced Echelon
AEROMED	Aeronautical Medicine
Agent Orange	An herbicide, such as 2,4-D, dispersed in Vietnam by the Air Force to destroy vegetation and jungle growth that provided concealment for enemy forces. A component was dioxin. Some military members who were exposed to the chemicals were later diagnosed with a variety of

	ailments, and became eligible for Agent Orange treatment and disability payments by the Department of Veterans Affairs.
AIT	Advanced Individual Training
AN/ALQ-144	"Disco Ball" omni-directional active infrared countermeasure against ground-to-air heat-seeking missiles.
ALSE	Aviation Life Support Equipment
Ambu Bag	Proprietary brand of a manual bag-valve resuscitator that is one of the most common devices used to ventilate and oxygenate patients. Ambu, Inc., a Danish company, introduced the first model in 1953.
AMEDD	Army Medical Department
ANVS-6 and -9	Army night vision goggles; the ANVS-9 works well in bright light, unlike the ANVS-6, which it replaced.
AO	Area of Operations
APR-39	Radar warning receiver
Apache	AH-64 "Apache" attack helicopter
ASE	Aircraft Survivability Equipment
ASMS	Area Support Medical Evacuation Section
ASMT	Area Support Medical Evacuation Team
AVIM	Aviation Intermediate Maintenance
AWACS	E3 "Sentry" Airborne Warning and Control System

B

Back haul	Return trip from a completed mission
Bagging	Manual resuscitation with an Ambu Bag; can also refer to putting bodies in body bags.
BDU	Battle Dress Uniform, the field and garrison camouflage uniform.
Black Hawk	UH-60 utility helicopter

C

C-5	Air Force "Galaxy" long range heavy transport plane
C-130	Air Force "Hercules" transport aircraft
C-141	Air Force "Starlifter" transport aircraft
CANA	Convulsive Antidote Nerve Agent
Cannon Plug	Rugged electronic equipment connector used in professional audio and video electronic cabling; named for its original manufacturer; also referred to as XLR for the original Cannon part code.
Carousel	The medical version of the Black Hawk incorporates a "carousel" for carrying four litter patients. It is affixed to a center pole that is mounted vertically inside the cabin, and rotates for loading. Two patients are "double-bunked" in litter pans supported by the carousel on opposite sides of the center pole.

CASEVAC	Casualty Evacuation (Marine/Navy terminology); use of general-purpose aircraft to provide evacuation of casualties. Aircraft will generally have a medical corpsman aboard for CASEVAC. Unlike Army Dustoff (MEDEVAC) air ambulances, these helicopters do not display the Geneva red cross and are not restricted to medical missions.
CECAT	Combat Enhanced Capability Aviation Team (Army)
CH-46	Navy/Marine "Sea Knight" medium lift helicopter, similar to Army CH-47 "Chinook"
CH-47	"Chinook" medium lift helicopter, similar to
CH-53	Navy/Marine "Sea Stallion" heavy lift helicopter
CMB	Combat Medical Badge
CO	Company; also Commanding Officer
Cobra	AH-1 attack helicopter
Collective	The collective controls the lift of the helicopter by changing the pitch of the rotor blades; is usually mounted at the left hand of the pilot.
Combat medic	See 91W.
COMMO	Communications
CONUS	Continental United States
Coriolis	The Coriolis Illusion involves the simultaneous stimulation of two semicircular canals of the ear, and is associated with a sudden tilting (forward or backwards) of the pilot's head while the aircraft is turning. This produces an almost unbearable sensation that the aircraft is rolling, pitching, and yawing, all at the same time. This illusion can make the pilot quickly become disoriented and lose control of the aircraft.
CPOG	Chemical Protective Over Garment, an Army chemical protective suit replaced by the JSLIST.
CRC	Control and Reporting Center, a U.S. Army Reserve mobilization activity.
CSAR	Combat Search and Rescue
CSH	Combat Surgical Hospital (Army unit)
CTT	Common Task Training

D

DART	Downed Aircraft Recovery Team
DASC	Direct Air Support Center (Marine)
DFAC	Dining Facility
Disco Ball	See AN/ALQ-144
DMOC	Division Medical Operations Center (Army)
DOT	Directorate of Training
Double Tap	Two strokes on the same computer key.
DSN	Defense Switched Network; military telephone network
Dustoff	Army MEDEVAC
DVD	Digital Video Disk

E

EFMB	Expert Field Medical Badge
ELT	Emergency Locator Transmitter: small transmitter affixed to aircraft that automatically activates in case of downed aircraft; Emitter Location Systems (including satellites) use directional finding (DF) technology to pinpoint location of ELTs for search and rescue.
EMS	Emergency Medical Services
EMT	Emergency Medical Technician
EMT-I	Emergency Medical Technician-Intermediate
EO	Equal Opportunity
EPW	Enemy Prisoner of War
EVAC	Evacuation, Evacuate

F

F/A-18	Navy/Marine "Hornet" all-weather fighter and attack aircraft
FARP	Forward Area Refuel/Rearm Point
FOD	Foreign Object Damage
FORSCOM	U.S. Army Forces Command, Fort McPherson, Georgia
FRG	Family Readiness Group, group organized for spouses and families left behind
FRSS	Forward Resuscitative Support System (Marine); a Level II mobile resuscitative surgery unit similar to the Army's Forward Surgical Team.
FSMC	Forward Support Medical Company (Army)
FSMT	Forward Support MEDEVAC Team (Army)
FST	Forward Surgical Team (Army)
FTX	Field Training Exercise

G

G-3	Operations Officer, General Staff
G-4	Supply Officer, General Staff
GPS	Global Positioning System
GS	General Support
Gulf War Syndrome	A pattern of symptoms reported by some veterans of Operation Desert Storm (Gulf War I).

H

Harrier	AV-8 Marine tactical strike aircraft
HEMTT	Heavy Expanded Mobility Tactical Truck

HH-60	Latest evolution of the UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter, encompassing lift, assault, general support and medical versions.
HM-1	Navy enlisted rate, Petty Officer 1st Class (Hospital Corpsman)
HQ	Headquarters
Huey	UH-1 “Iroquois” utility helicopter
Humvee	High-Mobility, Multi-Purpose, Wheeled Vehicle; 1.25 ton truck in 11 variants.
Hurricane Mitch	One of the strongest and deadliest Atlantic hurricanes ever recorded; on 28 October 1998 it reached 180 MPH. It struck Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador.

I

ID	Infantry Division
IMC	Instrument Meteorological Conditions
intel	Intelligence
IP	Instructor Pilot
IR	Infrared
Iridium	Data, voice and message service utilizing the Iridium Satellite System, a global, mobile service
ISU-90	Lightweight air-mobile 4-door cargo container, helicopter sling-able unit; dimensions: L-108 inches, W-88 inches, H-90 inches.
IV	Intravenous; refers to set used for administering IV fluids

J

JAG	Judge Advocate General; military lawyer
Jessica Lynch	See 507th Maintenance Company
JFK	John F. Kennedy International Airport, New York City
JRTC	Joint Readiness Training Center, Fort Polk, Louisiana
JSLIST	Joint Service Lightweight Integrated Suit Technology, a joint service-developed chemical protective garment. Also referred to in the interviews as Joint Service Chemical Suit (JSCS).

K

KC-135	"Stratotanker" Air Force air-refueling tanker aircraft
Kevlar	Helmet composed of Kevlar-29 ballistic fiber and phenolic PVB resin.
KIA	Killed in Action

L

Laptop	Portable computer

Levels II&III	Refers to Levels I-V in military medical doctrine, ranging from first aid and immediate life saving measures (Level I), to CONUS hospitals (Level V). Level II consists of 100% mobile facilities providing increased medical capability and limited inpatient bed space. Level III is the highest level of treatment units within the combat zone.
LifePak 10	Defibrillator most widely used in pre-hospital care. Includes ECG monitor and pacing cable.
Log Pack	Logistics Package, i.e., supplies.
LSA	Living and Support Area
LZ	Landing Zone

M

M-16	5.56 milimeter semi-automatic rifle
MAG	Marine Air Group
MALS	Marine Air Logistics Squadron
MANPADS	Man-Portable Air Defense System
MARDIV	Marine Division
Mark 1	Nerve agent antidote kit, consisting of one atropine and one 2-PAM chloride auto-injector linked together.
MASH	Mobile Army Surgical Hospital
MAST	Military Assistance for Safety and Traffic
MAW	Marine Air Wing
MED	Medical
MEDCOM	U.S. Army Medical Command
MEDEVAC	Medical Evacuation by helicopter air ambulances, also called Dustoff (Army terminology). These aircraft are restricted to medical missions, display the Geneva red cross, and routinely have aboard the dedicated patient care capability provided by specialized personnel and equipment.
MEF	Marine Expeditionary Force, the largest Marine air/ground task force; consists of a full division, force service support group, and a Marine aircraft wing; 1st MEF (I MEF) was the three-star headquarters for all Marine units in Iraq.
METL	Mission Essential Task List
MEU	Marine Expeditionary Unit, the smallest of the three Marine air/ground task force organizations. The next largest is the Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB), followed by the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF).
MFO	Multinational Force and Observers; non-UN peacekeeping group in the Sinai Peninsula.
MG	Morris Garage; brand of sports cars
MI	Military Intelligence
MILVAN	Military Van; Military-owned demountable container

MIRC	Military Internet Relay Chat; IRCs are multi-user "chat" system where people convene on channels to talk in groups or privately, i.e. a "chat room."
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
MOPP	Mission Oriented Protective Posture; prescribes wear of protective clothing and equipment at various levels of protection against chemical or biological hazard.
MOPP-4	Mission Oriented Protective Posture; wearing full oversuit, gloves and mask.
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty
MP	Military Police; Army MPs are members of the Military Police Corps.
MRE	Meals, Ready to Eat
MRO	Medical Regulating Officer
MSC	Medical Service Corps

N

NBC	Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NCOIC	Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge
NIPR	Non-Secure Internet Protocol Router; a NIPR "drop" is a connection via landline to a NIPR. Also referred to as NIPRNET.
NORAD	North American Aerospace Defense Command
NTC	National Training Center, Fort Irwin, California; Army desert training center.
NVG	Night Vision Goggles

O

OBC	Officer Basic Course
OCS	Officer Candidate School
OH-6	"Cayeuse" observation helicopter
OH-58	"Kiowa" armed reconnaissance helicopter
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
OP	Observation Post
OP orders	Operation orders
OPD	Officer Professional Development
Operation Desert Spring	Since 1 October 1999, part of on-going operations after Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm to maintain forward presence and to provide control and force protection for Army units in Kuwait.
OPS	Operations
OPTEMPO	Operational Tempo
OR	Operational Readiness

OTSG	Office of The Surgeon General, Army. TSG is also the Commanding General, U.S. Army Medical Command. OTSG is located in Falls Church, Virginia. Headquarters, USAMEDCOM is located at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas.

P

P-51	"Mustang" fighter aircraft of WWII
PC	Pilot-in-Command (also PIC)
PCS	Permanent Change of Station
PDA	Personal Digital Assistant, a hand-held computer that serves as an organizer for personal information.
PET	Patient Evacuation Team (Marine)
PI	Pilot (co-pilot)
PIC	Pilot-in-Command (also PC)
POL	Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricants; The 498th Air Ambulance Company included a POL section.
POR	Processed for Overseas Replacement
POW	Prisoner of War
ProPaq	Monitoring system for blood pressure, respirations
Proprioceptive	Proprioceptive receptors are special sensors located in the skin, muscles, tendons, and joints that play a small role in maintaining spatial orientation. For example, they make it possible for pilots to know they are seated while flying, but by themselves will not let the pilot differentiate between flying straight and level or performing a coordinated turn.
PT	Physical Training
PX	Post Exchange [Army and Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES)]

Q

QuikClot	Hemostatic agent that controls moderate to severe bleeding by promoting rapid coagulation and hemostasis. Battle pack contains one package of QuikClot, two gauze pads, and a compression bandage in a pocketsize nylon waterproof case.

R

Reset	Army program to restore, recondition and reissue equipment.
ROE	Rules of Engagement
Roland	Radar guided surface-to-air missile
ROTC	Reserve Officer Training Corps.
Route Michigan	Treacherous 4.5 mile section of the Ramadi-Fallujah highway, an east-west artery that runs through the center of Ramadi, used by convoys supplying the Marines.

RPG	Rocket Propelled Grenade
RTO	Radio/Telephone Operator

S

S-2	Intelligence, Special Staff
S-3	Operations, Special Staff
SAAFR	Standard Army Aviation Flight Route
SAR	Search and Rescue
Seabees	Navy Construction Battalions (CB)
SEAL	Sea, Air, Land: Navy special operations teams trained for insertion by water, air, or over land.
SFOR	Stabilization Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina; U.S. deployments since cessation of hostilities in 1995 are numbered: SFOR 8 was Oct 2000-April 2001; SFOR 10 was October 2001-April 2002.
SIPR	Secure Internet Protocol Router, also called SIPRNET
SITREP	Situation Report
Slicks	Vietnam War term for assault helicopters, armed only with protective armament systems, and used for inserting troops into combat during airmobile operations.
SRP	Soldier Readiness Processing, formerly called Processed for Overseas Replacement (POR)
Stinger	FIM-92 shoulder-fired surface-to-air missile
STIR	Special Technical Inspection and Repair

T

TACOPS	Tactical Operations
TAMMIS	Theater Army Medical Management and Information System
T-CAM	TAMMIS Customer Assistance Module
TARAWA	Task Force Tarawa: 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade from Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, plus attached units
TDY	Temporary Duty
TH-67	"Creek" training helicopter used for initial entry rotary wing training
Thuraya	Thuraya Satellite Telecommunications Company, a regional mobile satellite system established April 1997 in the United Arab Emirates.
TOC	Tactical Operations Center
TOE	Table of Organization and Equipment (Army field units)

U

UCMJ	Uniform Code of Military Justice: A "chapter" case is an elimination proceeding conducted under the provisions of a chapter of the UCMJ.
UH-1	"Iroquois" utility helicopter, the "Huey"
UH-60	"Black Hawk" utility helicopter
UH-60Q	Advanced medical version of the UH-60, approved by the Army in 1994 with testing through 1998; four UH-60Qs were in service with the Tennessee National Guard as of January 2004.
UHF	Ultra-high frequency radios
UK	United Kingdom
USAMMA	United States Army Medical Materiel Agency, Fort Detrick, Maryland
USAR	United States Army Reserve
USB	Universal Serial Bus, a type of plug-in connector used to connect devices to desktop or laptop computers.
USMC	United States Marine Corps
USNS	United States Naval Ship – a civilian-manned, non-combat vessel

V-Z

XO	Executive Officer
Zip-tied	Plastic tie-down straps used as expedient handcuffs
ZSU-23-4	4-barreled 23mm self-propelled antiaircraft gun

RANK

CPT	Captain; O-3
MAJ	Major; O-4
LTC	Lieutenant Colonel; O-5
COL	Colonel; O-6
WO1	Warrant Officer, grade 1
CW2 (through 5)	Chief Warrant Officer, grades 2-5
PV2	Private, E-2 enlisted rank (Army); Private First Class (Marines)
PFC	Private First Class, E-3 enlisted rank (Army), Lance Corporal (Marines)
CPL	Corporal, E-4 enlisted rank (Army, Marines)
SPC	Specialist, E-4 enlisted rank (Army)
SGT	Sergeant, E-5 enlisted rank (Army, Marines)
SSG	Staff Sergeant, E-6 enlisted rank (Army, Marines)
SFC	Sergeant First Class, E-7 enlisted rank (Army); Gunnery Sergeant (Marines)
1SG	First Sergeant, senior NCO in a unit that does not have a Sergeant Major